CRITICAL ROLE
VOX MACHINA™
ORIGINS

SERIES I AND II COLLECTION

JODY HOUSER ♦ MATTHEW COLVILLE ♦ OLIVIA SAMSON
MSASSYK ♦ CHRIS NORTHROP ♦ ARIANA MAHER

FOREWORD BY GAIL SIMONE

CRITICAL ROLE

VOX MACHINA ORIGINS™

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CRITICAL ROLE

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Foreword by

GAIL SIMONE

(A.K.A. THE HONORABLE VISCOUNTESS FUSSYBRITCHES MCBEARLORD)

Okay, let's get one thing straight right up front.

This is YOUR fault.

Not the gifted creators of the show, not the talented cast, not the lovely staff and support team.

No, this is all on you. The CRITTERS.

I wasn't exactly looking for a new fandom, all right? I can barely keep up with the comics/kaiju/gaming nonsense that I'm already obsessed with, let alone some new weird group of weird weirdos playing D&D for fifty-eleven-hundred hours on the internets or whatever.

I mean, I love role-playing games. I met my husband playing D&D (I insisted on playing a halfling fighter, which he's still laughing about to this day). I go to cons all over the world, and always try to sneak a few minutes to go watch people play in the game rooms. And I've purchased simply endless volumes of rule books and starter kits and sourcebooks for sessions I just never found the time to play.

Somehow, I became the absentee mom of my own RPG obsession, and those books went unread, those dice went unrolled.

But then, I started hearing these strange chatterings, like those of a half-drunk tiefling, that there was this THING. This fun thing happening in the RPG community. Critical Role, they called it.

I had no idea what it was. I would see huge signing lines at cons, but I didn't know if it was a game, a blog, or what. As I said, I wasn't looking for a new fandom, so I simply kept on with my business, which was probably writing one guy in a cape punching another guy in a cape, or maybe kissing, it's hard to say. Both, maybe?

But enough of you, you confounded Critters, talked this thing up so much that I had to at least check it out. And I loved it. And everywhere I turned, the fandom was wonderful and kind and welcoming. So pretty soon, I'm listening to three-hour episodes like popping endless cans of Pringles, and I'm as invested in this group of goons as I am in the Justice League. That's all on you.

And now I'm ruined forever.

Because of you.

I hope you're happy.

Just a bit about the show, here. Odds are, you know vastly more than I do, so I'll be brief.

From a storyteller's point of view it's a wonder, it's a kaleidoscope. Every direction you turn it, you feel that there's a history, there's a story, there's a topography of imagination. I've played many role-playing games and run a fair few, and mine tend to be sloppier, more potluck than fine dining.

But you have to admire the chef's rare gifts.

And the cast…half the fun is seeing how incredibly, endearingly GAME they are. Talented? Yes, endlessly. And funny, too. But I love that you can throw them any ridiculous, absurd, bawdy situation and their unanimous responses is, "Give us hell, Storyteller, we're UP FOR IT."

It's pretty magical.

About the comic itself…it's so clearly a passion project, which is my favorite kind of anything.

The writing is faithful in tone but adventurous in structure, with stories by Matthew Mercer himself, realized by the extremely talented Matthew Colville and Jody Houser. They wisely don't attempt to recreate the show, but instead work to the strengths of comics, and the result is luminous.

Special praise needs to be laid at the feet of Olivia Samson, who is the perfect artist for this, and whom I am hoping to steal for some project as soon as the cast's backs are turned. There's charm and life on one page, despair and hopelessness on the next. Perfection.

Outstanding color work by Chris Northrup and MSASSYK round out the book like custom dice and a new game mat.

But still, I never would have discovered this without the Critters. You took me in, and now it's not just a show, it's a great big huge stinky family. And like I said about the cast, I am UP FOR IT.

The best thing is I've started role-playing again. D&D, Cthulhu, Alien, Pathfinder. I rediscovered a joy I had been leaving on a shelf for too long, because of this show and its fandom.

Because of you.

I HOPE YOU'RE HAPPY.

Gail Simone is an award-winning writer of comics and animation, including Deadpool, Secret Six, Wonder Woman, Batgirl, *and more. She lives on the Oregon coast with her family and greyhounds, and rumor has it she might be a bear.*

THEY WILL SAVE THE WORLD.

SCANLAN SHORTHALT
BARDIC MASTER AKA THE MEAT MAN

GROG STRONGJAW
GRAND POOBAH OF DE DOINK

LORD PERCIVAL FREDRICKSTEIN VON MUSEL KLOSSOWSKI DE ROLO III, SOPHIST OF NATIVE INGENUITY OF WHITESTONE

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GNOME BARD

KEYLETH
HALF-ELVEN DRUID

VAX'ILDAN
HALF-ELVEN ROGUE

VEX'AHLIA
HALF-ELVEN RANGER

EVENTUALLY.

HE'S STILL BREATHING, THOUGH. SEE?

MAYBE... MAYBE HE'LL GET BETTER.

HERE, I'LL NURSE HIM. I'LL NURSE HIM AND HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT. HE'LL BE ***FINE***. BABY'S ***FINE***, HE'S ***ALIVE***. HE'S ***ALIVE***. HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT. OH.

'E WON'T BE FINE. WON'T NEVER BE FINE, AND YOU ***KNOW IT***.

AIN'T REALLY LIVIN'. IT'S ***CURSED***. JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.

THIS IS JUST WHAT YOU ***DESERVE***, YOU AND YOUR YOUNG MAN. THE WAY YOU TWO LIVE. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU GOT TO DO.

NO. WE DIDN'T DO NOTHIN'. THIS AIN'T MY FAULT. HE'S ***FINE***. HE'S GOING TO BE ***FINE***. MY BABY.

YOU'RE TOO ***WEAK!*** TOO WEAK TO DO WHAT ***MUST*** BE DONE!

NO! MY BABY! MY BABY!

LET ME GO! I CAN SAVE HIM! WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!

THE LADY OF THE MUCK LAID THIS *CURSE* ON US. AND IT WON'T STOP 'TIL SHE'S APPEASED!

NO! NO, STOP! LET ME GO! I CAN SAVE HIM!

COME ON, FATHER. BRING THE *GEL*, SHE DON'T NEED TO SEE THIS.

NO. NO, MY BABY. MY BABY.

IT'S THE CURSE. *CURSE* OF THE SIGHING GOD.

BE MORE BABES GIVEN TO HER BEFORE THE NIGHT IS THROUGH.

WELCOME TO THE WORLD, KID. YOU DIDN'T MISS ANYTHING.

WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE ARE THESE?

NO DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER. AT LEAST THAT MOTHER FOUGHT TO KEEP HER CHILD.

YOU'RE A CYNIC, *SISTER*.

NOT IF I'M *RIGHT* I'M NOT.

WE SHOULD WAIT 'TIL SHE'S AWAY FROM HER PARENTS AND TALK TO HER.

YOU CAN TALK TO PEASANTS *ANYTIME*. TRACKING'S HARD ENOUGH ON LAND.

ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE ACROSS WATER.

I FEEL EXPOSED OUT HERE. GOOD PLACE FOR AN AMBUSH. WE CAN AVOID THAT, RIGHT?

BUT YOU CAN TRACK THEM? ACROSS WATER?

IT'S THEIR SWAMP, *BROTHER*. WHOEVER THEY ARE. IF THEY WANT TO AMBUSH US THERE ISN'T A LOT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT.

OF COURSE I CAN. NOW COME ON...

LET'S GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS, GET PAID, AND GET OUT OF HERE.

STILBEN

POPULATION: ~9,000
MAJOR TRADE HUB FOR THE EASTERN COAST OF TAL'DOREI. AKA 'THE ROTTED LOT.'

WE COULD JUST ASK THE LOCALS WHAT LIVES OUT HERE.

THEY'D SAY 'DEMONS,' OR SOME IGNORANT NONSENSE. PEASANTS DON'T KNOW ANYTHING EXCEPT HOW TO MAKE MORE PEASANTS.

WE WERE ***RAISED*** BY A PEASANT.

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.

FATHER WASN'T WORTH A SHIT BUT HE WAS NOBLE-BORN AND AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, ONCE I GRADUATED FROM THE SCHOOL, SO WAS ***I***.

NOBLE-BORN DON'T GRUB AROUND IN THE MUCK CHASING AFTER A SWAMP-GOD CURSE.

THEY DO IF ***I'M*** DOING IT.

IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO TAKE THIS JOB, REMEMBER. YOU SAID WE NEEDED THE WORK.

I DIDN'T MEAN CHARITY.

IT'S NOT CHARITY, STUBBY. IT'S JUST...NOT A LOT.

BESIDES, WHEN DO ***WE*** GET TO SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE THIS? CURE A CURSE? IT SHOULD FEEL GOOD.

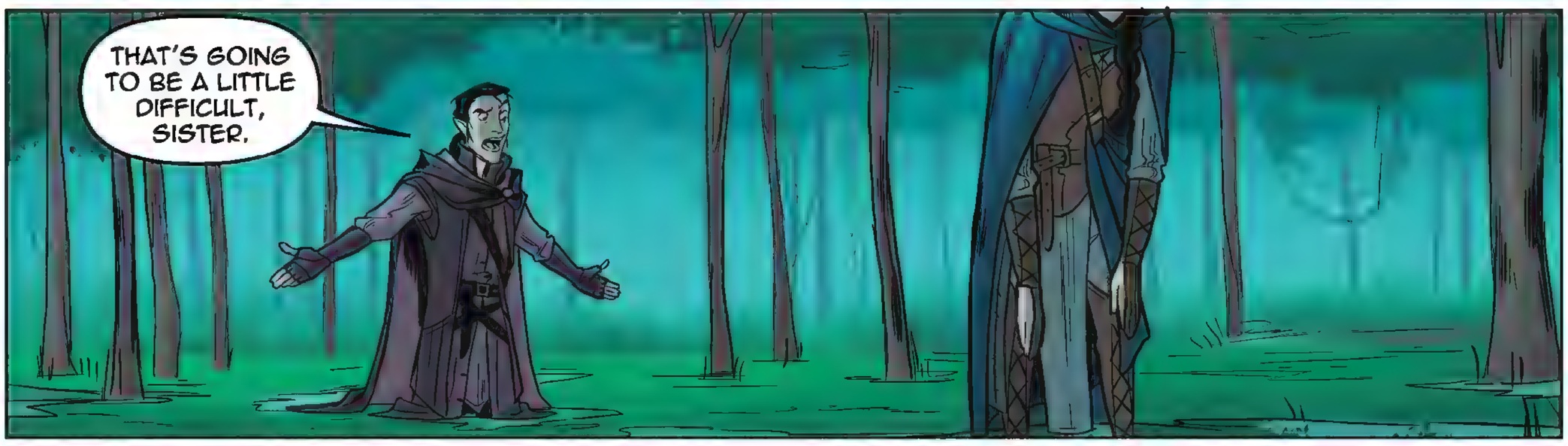
IT FEELS SUSPICIOUS. NOTHING HAPPENS IN A TOWN LIKE THIS WITHOUT SOMEONE MAKING MONEY OFF IT.

A CURSE DOESN'T SEEM VERY PROFITABLE.

IT IS TO SOMEONE. HANG ON.

SALTWATER. THIS IS A SALTWATER SWAMP. THAT'S INTERESTING.
I'LL TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT.

VAX, GET OUT OF THE WATER!


THAT'S GOING TO BE A LITTLE DIFFICULT, SISTER.

VAX!

THWIP!

Δεατη το λλ τρεσπασσερσ!

ΙΗ-ΗΙΗ.

VAX!

OW.

OH BROTHER, THIS IS MY FAULT. I WAS SO KEEN ON THE CHASE, I DIDN'T NOTICE ANYTHING ELSE.

IT'S LIKE A METAPHOR.

SHUT UP.

NONE OF THIS MAKES SENSE. WHY WOULD GHORMAUTH CURSE THE TOWN?

WE *SAW* IT TAKE THE CHILD.

THE SHARK-SPEAKERS ARE TRIBAL, TERRITORIAL, PRIMITIVE. THEY'VE NO PARTICULAR HATRED FOR MEN, BUT THEY'RE NOT STUPID. THEY'LL TAKE A FREE BABY IF YOU THROW THEM ONE.

I'M HALLUCINATING. I JUST SAW THAT SQUIRREL WAVE AT ME.

YOU'VE LOST A LOT OF BLOOD. I'LL GET YOU BACK TO TOWN.

THAT SQUIRREL JUST GAVE ME THE MOST INTELLIGENT LOOK I'VE EVER SEEN FROM AN ANIMAL.

WHAT? THERE'S NO SQUIRRELS OUT HERE.

COUGH *COUGH* *SPLUTTER* AHEM. IT'S BECAUSE I HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT GILLS YET, OKAY? ALSO, HELLO!

WHO ARE YOU?

OW.

OH, I'M...NO, I'M NOBODY. I'M...IT'S NOT IMPORTANT. I'M KEYLETH.

I'M DYING. I'M DYING AND I'M HALLUCINATING A SQUIRREL WHO CAN TURN INTO PEOPLE.

WOW.

'WOW'?

YOU SLIT ITS THROAT.

YES.

FROM BEHIND.

SAFEST WAY.

I GUESS SO! I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS. WHAT IS IT?

IT'S A SHARK-SPEAKER. THIS IS THEIR SWAMP.

NEAT!

...'NEAT.'

THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN THINK THESE CREATURES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR A CURSE. THEIR BABIES ARE STILLBORN.

REALLY? THAT'S INTERESTING.

WHAT WERE YOU TWO DOING OUT HERE?

WE GOT LOST.

OH. WELL IT *IS* A BIG SWAMP.

YOU ALSO GOT BIT.

WHAT? OH, IT'S NOTHING.

THE WATER IN THIS SWAMP IS DANGEROUS, ESPECIALLY IF IT GETS IN AN OPEN WOUND. HERE, LET ME.

TRUST ME.

HUH.

YOU'RE WELCOME.

OH, UH. YEAH.

HE MEANS 'THANK YOU.'

SO YOU'RE LIKE... TWINS?

YEAH.

WOW, THAT'S SO COOL, DO YOU LIKE...FINISH EACH OTHER'S SENTENCES?

...

NO.

SOMETIMES VAX STABS SOMEONE BUT HIS POISONS ARE OLD AND THE GUY DOESN'T DIE RIGHT AWAY AND I HAVE TO KILL HIM. THAT'S...SORT OF ...THE SAME?

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU DID THAT.

WELL I DON'T MAKE A BIG DEAL ABOUT IT, I KNOW POISON'S HARD TO COME BY.

THAT'S ACTUALLY REALLY SWEET OF YOU.

HEY, WHAT ARE SISTERS FOR?

WOW, YOU REALLY ARE TWINS!

WHAT?

FORGIVE MY BROTHER. HE'S NEVER SEEN ANOTHER *OTHLIR* BEFORE.

WHAT'S AN OTHLIR?

YOU ARE. WE ARE. IT'S ELVEN FOR *ILL-BORN*.

HALF ELVEN, HALF HUMAN.

DAD FROM WHICHEVER RACE WAS DOING THE CONQUERING AT THE TIME.

WHAT? OH. REALLY? I MEAN, NO! NO, MY PARENTS...NO, THEY LOVED EACH OTHER. STILL DO! I THINK. 'ILLBORN'? REALLY? WOW.

REALLY.

COULD YOU STOP SAYING 'WOW,' PLEASE?

THAT'S TERRIBLE, WHY WOULD THEY CALL YOU THAT?

WELL, YOU SEEM NICE TO ME, ANYWAY. NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME, I'M TESTING A THEORY.

WHAT THEORY?

'NICE'?

A SORCERER FRIEND OF MINE SAID HE THOUGHT THE PEOPLE WERE BEING *POISONED*. NOT CURSED.

THAT'S INTERESTING.

THE PEOPLE LIVE OFF THE SWAMP. POISON THE WATER AND THEY'LL ALL GET SICK. HANG ON.

YOU JUST DRANK POISONED AND/OR CURSED SALT WATER.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? I MEAN MENTALLY.

WAS SOMEONE TAKING CARE OF YOU AND YOU WANDERED OFF?

UM. OH, IT'S BAD. UGH. BLECH.

ARE YOU GOING TO NEED A PRIEST?

ME? OH, NO. I MEAN THIS...THE ORIGINAL DOSE MUST BE ***REALLY*** POTENT. DILUTED LIKE THIS... IT WOULD ONLY AFFECT THE VERY ILL, OR THE VERY YOUNG. AND ONLY THE PEOPLE LIVING NEAR THE SWAMP.

YOU SEEM LIKE A USEFUL PERSON TO KNOW...

WE HAVE BUSINESS BACK IN TOWN. THANK YOU FOR HEALING MY BROTHER AND THE OTHERWISE VERY WEIRD EXPERIENCE. YOU SHOULD BE CAREFUL ALONE.

OH, I'LL BE ALL RIGHT. I'LL BE QUIET AS A MOUSE! OR, AS IT HAPPENS, A SQUIRREL.

UH-HUH. COME, BROTHER. GOOD LUCK, STRANGE PERSON.

OKAY, WELL, IT WAS NICE MEETING YOU!

WHO TOLD YOU IT WAS A CURSE?

ALCHEMIST. NAMED, UH ...ZETH.

WELL, WE THINK... IT'S LOOKING MORE LIKE POISON. LIKE ...SOMEONE IN THE CITY IS POISONING...WELL, YOU, AND BLAMING IT ON THE FISH-MEN.

WHO'D WANT TO DO THAT? WHAT'D WE DO? WHAT'D ANY OF US DO?

DOES IT MATTER?

'SPOSE NOT.

THEY WAS GONNA BE TWINS. BUT THEY'RE GONE NOW. AND THEN THEIR MAMA...WELL, THERE WEREN'T NOTHIN' LEFT INSIDE, I GUESS. I BURIED HER, AFTER I DRAGGED HER BODY OUT THE SWAMP.

FIGURE SEEING THIS THROUGH IS THE ONLY THING KEEPING ME HERE. AND THERE AIN'T NO ONE LEFT NOW TO DO RIGHT BY ME IF I GO THE WAY SHE DID.

GLAD YOU'RE STICKING WITH IT. IF IT'S A JOB NEEDS MORE PAYIN', WE COULD MAYBE COLLECT A FEW MORE...

YOU PAID US ENOUGH. JUST KNOW THAT WE'RE MAKING PROGRESS. WORKING THE PROBLEM.

ALL RIGHT.

HOW MUCH DID THEY PAY US?

YOU TOLD ME NOT TO TELL YOU.

I CHANGED MY MIND.

THIRTEEN GOLD.

THIRTEEN GOLD--OH MY GOD. WHY DID YOU TELL ME?! WHAT ARE WE DOING? IT'S NOTHING. IT'S ***LITERALLY*** NOTHING. MY ALLOWANCE AT THE SCHOOL WAS MORE THAN THAT AND I DIDN'T HAVE TO RISK MY LIFE. MUCH.

BECAUSE TO FATHER, ***THAT*** WAS NOTHING. BUT TO THESE PEOPLE, THIRTEEN GOLD WAS ALL THEY HAD. VEX, THEY PAID US ***...EVERYTHING.***

...ALL RIGHT, SHUT UP. STOP TRYING TO MAKE ME FEEL GUILTY. OR FEEL ***ANYTHING***. LET'S FIND THAT ALCHEMIST.

'ZETH' IS A MAN, RIGHT? THAT'S WHAT WE'RE ASSUMING?

LIKELY.

ALL RIGHT, WAIT HERE.

WAY AHEAD OF YOU.

GOOD AFTERNOON, YOUNG LADY. FANCY SOME FORAMERE LAVENDER? THAT OUTFIT'S SEEN BETTER DAYS, I COULD HAVE A TAILOR LOOK AT IT BEFORE WE DYE IT.

WELL, THAT'S A VERY GENEROUS OFFER.

I'M A GENEROUS MAN, WHEN I'M IN THE MOOD.

OH, I BET YOU ARE. SPEAKING OF MOODS, I'M IN THE MOOD FOR SOMETHING ...CAUSTIC.

CAUSTIC? LIKE LYE, YOU MEAN?

HOPING FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE ...POTENT.

LIKE *AQUA REGIA*, MAYBE? NOTHING LIKE THAT AROUND HERE, FRIEND. NO CALL FOR THAT SORT OF STUFF IN THE MUCK.

THAT'S TOO BAD.

STILL, IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TOXIC?

YES?

THERE'S BOUND TO BE PLACES IN THE CITY PROPER. ASK AROUND AT THE TAVERNS, MAYBE.

AH. WELL, THANKS.

SURE I CAN'T INTEREST YOU IN SOME RIFENMIST CARDINAL? BRIGHTEN THAT CLOAK UP A TREAT, VERY FASHIONABLE.

MY DEAR MAN, WHATEVER I'M WEARING *IS* FASHIONABLE.

CLACK!

I *HATE* WHEN THAT DOESN'T WORK. MAKES ME WANT TO *SHOOT* THINGS. PEOPLE. *HIM*.

MAYBE *I* SHOULD HAVE TRIED.

I DON'T THINK YOU WERE HIS TYPE. YOU WALK ON TWO LEGS.

DID HE SEEM... DO YOU THINK HE *KNEW* YOU WERE DIGGING?

FISKARIN

MAYBE HE GUESSED? I COULD HAVE BEEN SUBTLER, I SUPPOSE.

LET'S JUST SIT HERE. SEE WHAT HE DOES.

IF HE'S BOXED, HE MIGHT GO FOR...

...HIS SUPPLIER. COME ON!

THAT WAS GOOD THINKING.

FIRST YEAR AT THE SCHOOL, TAILING A SUBJECT. WEREN'T YOU PAYING ATTENTION?

WHAT WAS THAT, INTELLIGENCE GATHERING? I WAS PAYING ATTENTION TO THE TEACHER, MOSTLY.

FIGURES.

HELLO?

YOU WERE FOLLOWED.

AAAH! HOW DID YOU...?

I TAKE THIS AS A SIGN YOUR PLAN IS WORKING. THEY HIRED SOMEONE TO FIND YOU AND STOP YOU.

IT'S WORKING. ANOTHER WEEK...TEN DAYS, THERE'LL BE NO ONE LEFT IN THE MUCK. THEY'RE ALL LEAVING.

UM.

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ***WANT*** WHEN THIS IS OVER, ZETH. YOU COULD HAVE YOUR PICK OF ANY DISTRICT IN THE CITY.

I'VE THOUGHT ABOUT IT. OH, UM. BUT...WHAT ABOUT THE...THE ONES FOLLOWING ME?

JUST IGNORE THEM. GO ABOUT YOUR BUSINESS. ***I'LL*** TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING.

THIS IS EASIER THAN I THOUGHT. WE'VE GOT HIS CONTACT'S LOCATION AND WHO KNOWS WHAT ELSE. LET'S GO.

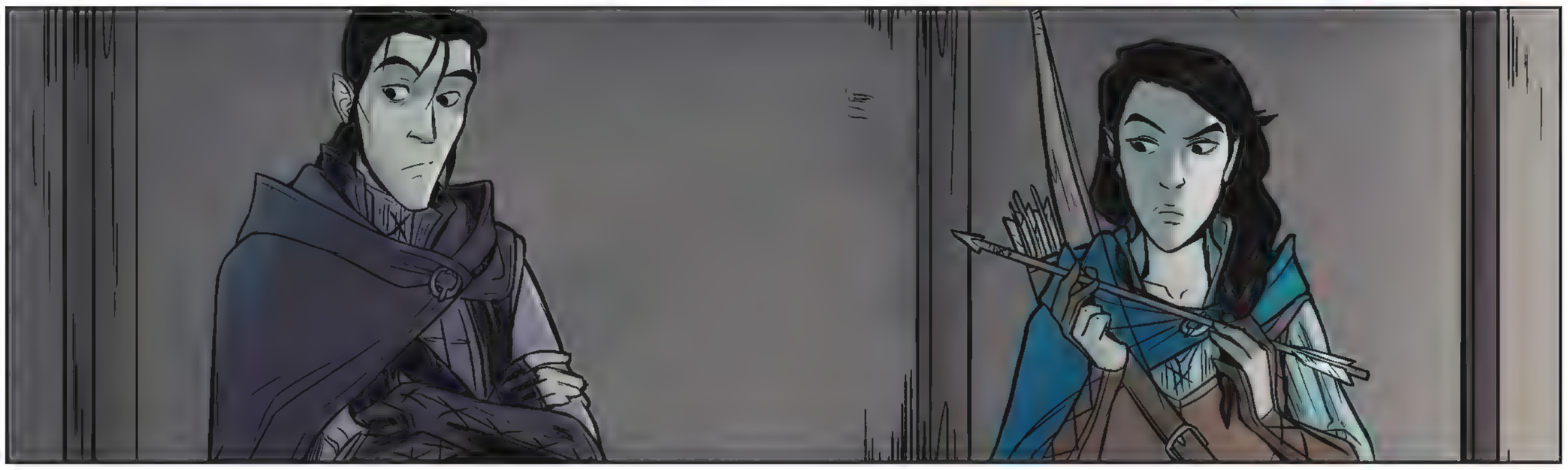
ANK!

HNG.

CHUNT!

SIX OF THEM! *OW*
WHO IS THAT ALCHEMIST!?
I FIND MYSELF SUDDENLY MUCH LESS BORED BY ALL THIS!
THIS WAS A HIT. NO QUESTIONS ASKED, NO QUARTER GIVEN. THEY WEREN'T TRYING TO WARN US OFF.

WHO IS TRYING TO WARN US OFF WHAT?!
WE NEED TO KNOW WHO THE ALCHEMIST WORKS FOR. HE'S THE ONLY PERSON WE'VE TALKED TO.
BACK TO THE ALCHEMIST'S SHOP?
WE GO BACK NOW, IT'LL EITHER BE EMPTY OR FULL OF ASSASSINS WAITING FOR US. THEY'D GET HIM TO A BOLTHOLE UNTIL THEY KNEW WE WERE TAKEN CARE OF.
SO WHERE?
DUNNO.


WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT DRUID?

THEY WILL SAVE THE WORLD.

SCANLAN SHORTHALT
BARDIC MASTER AKA THE MEAT MAN

GROG STRONGJAW
GRAND POOBAH OF DE DOINK

LORD PERCIVAL FREDRICKSTEIN VON MUSEL KLOSSOWSKI DE ROLO III, SOPHIST OF NATIVE INGENUITY OF WHITESTONE

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VEX'AHLIA
HALF-ELVEN RANGER

SCANLAN SHORTHALT
GNOME BARD

EVENTUALLY.

I REALLY WANT TO RING THE BELL.

DO NOT...I SWEAR TO GOD, *DO NOT RING THE BELL, YOU LITTLE SHIT.*

BUT HOW DO WE KNOW? MAYBE THIS IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD FIGHT?

WE'LL SUMMON SOME EVIL THAT HAS TO BE DEFEATED AND HAS LOTS OF TREASURE, MAYBE?

SCANLAN SHORTHALT, I SHALL FIREBALL YOU THE NEXT TIME YOU'RE ON THE PRIVY IF YOU DON'T HIE THEE HENCE! WE ARE BESET BY ENEMIES!

GROG, WHAT DO YOU THINK?

GROG, DO NOT ANSWER HIM!

WELL, I FINK, IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS, RIGHT? YOU GOT TO GO WITH YOUR GUT.

GROG, I LOVE YOU, AND WANT TO HAVE YOUR BABIES.

AW, FANKS, SCANLAN.

HIT IT, GROG.

BUM BUM
BUM BUM

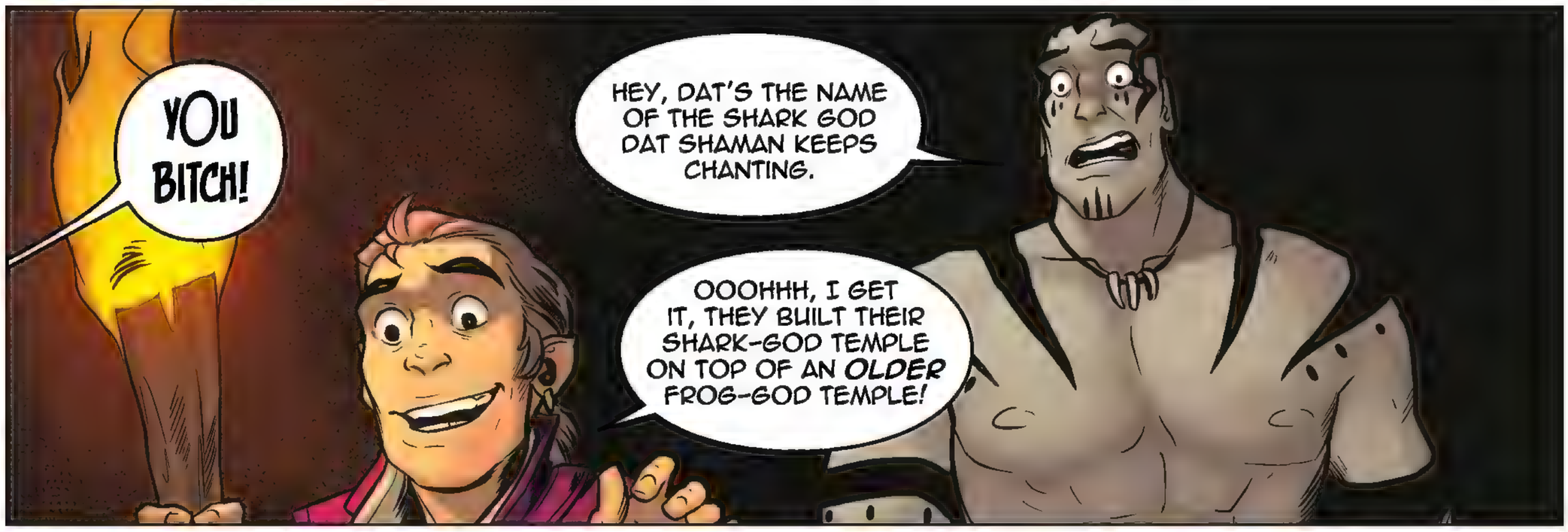
TING!

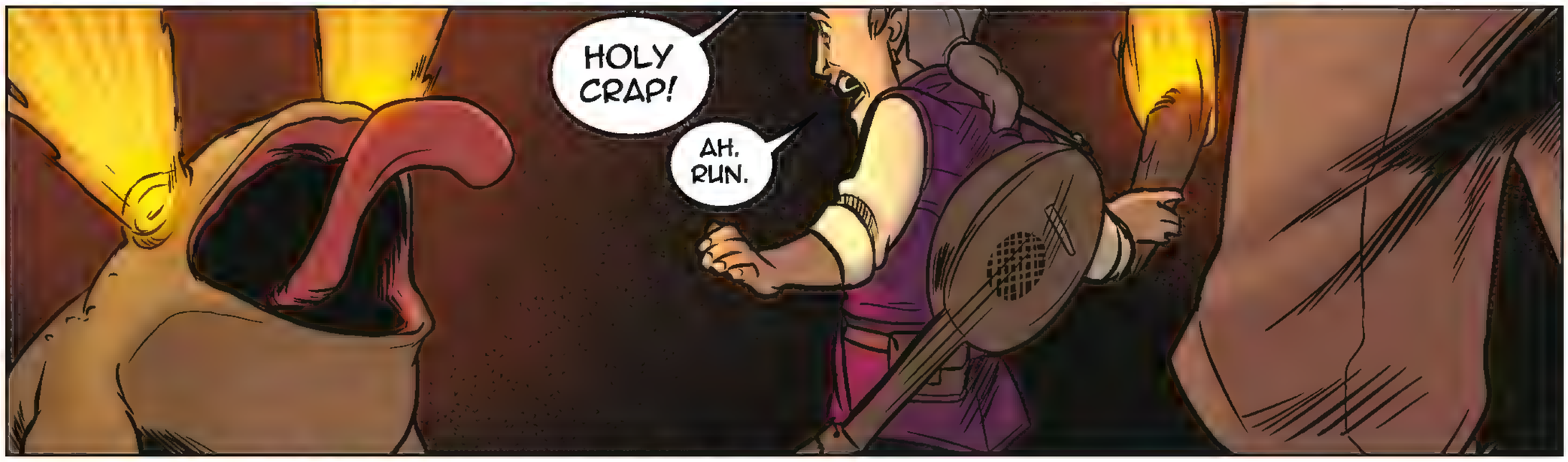
BUM BUM

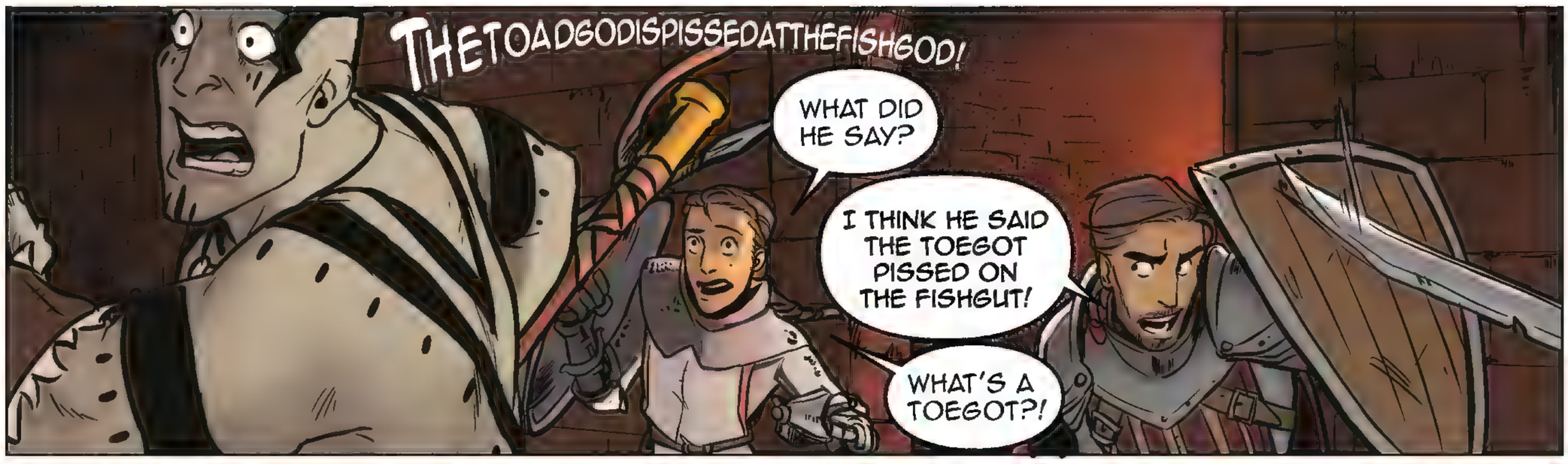
WHOAH!

OH SHIT!

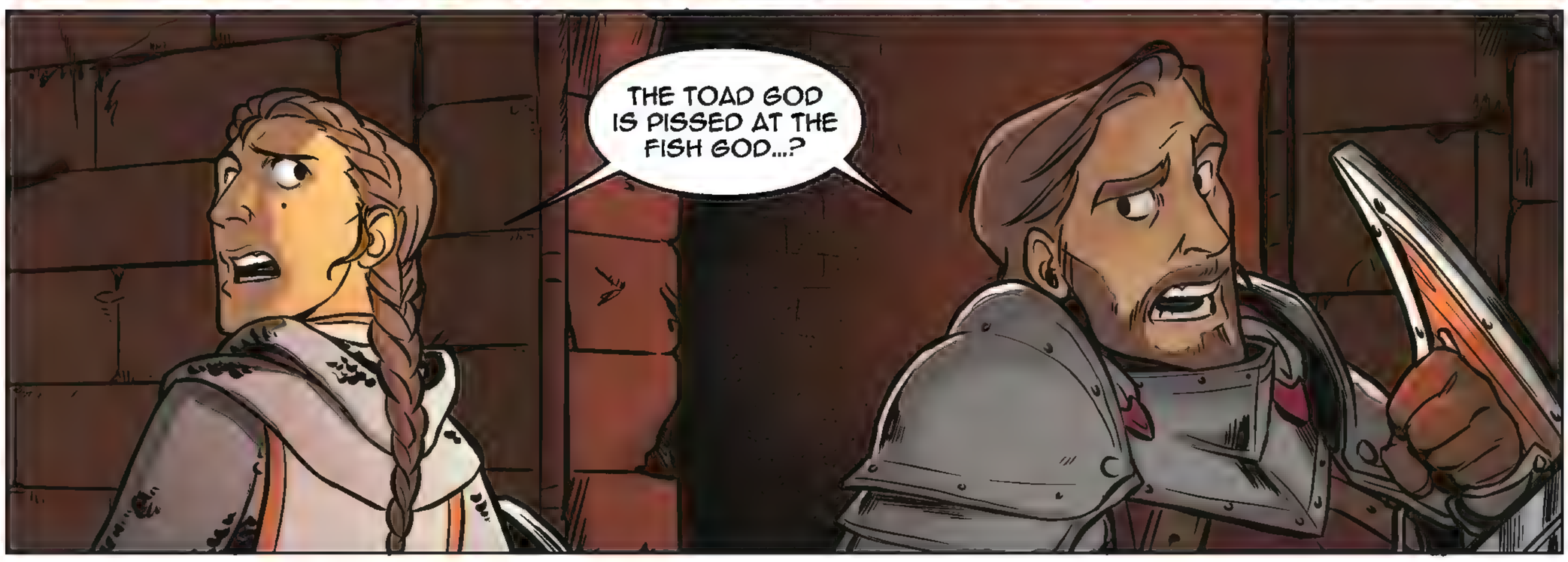
HOARMORATH!


YOU BITCH!
HEY, DAT'S THE NAME OF THE SHARK GOD DAT SHAMAN KEEPS CHANTING.
OOOHHH, I GET IT, THEY BUILT THEIR SHARK-GOD TEMPLE ON TOP OF AN *OLDER* FROG-GOD TEMPLE!

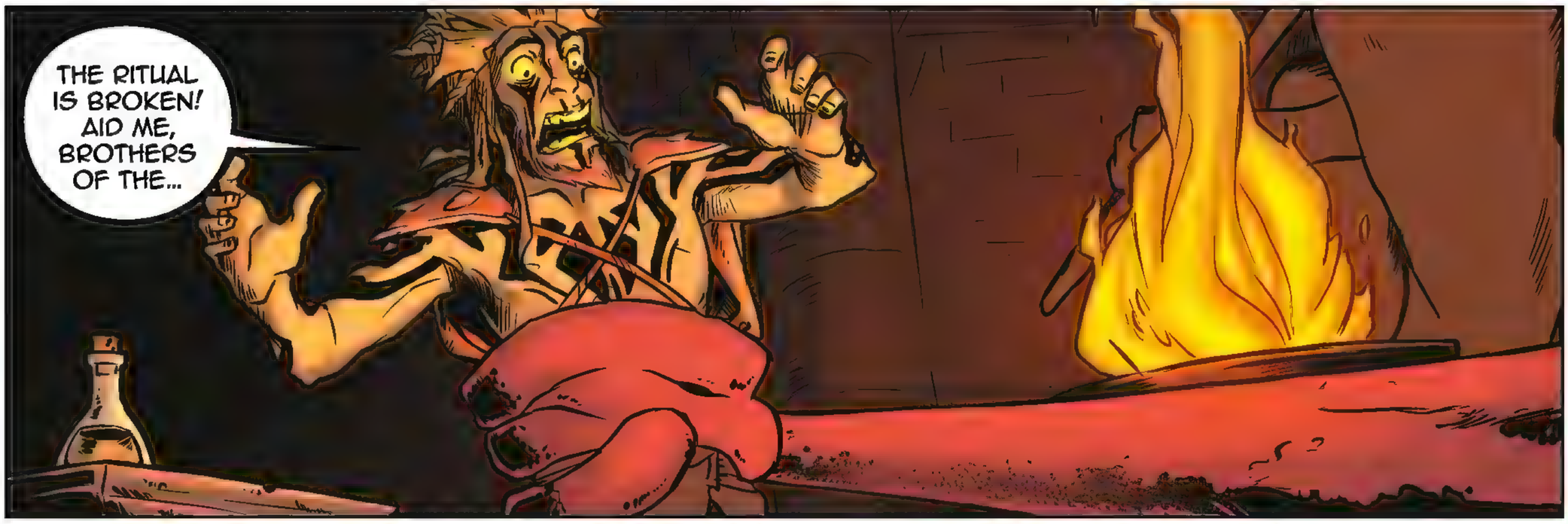

HOLY CRAP!
AH. RUN.

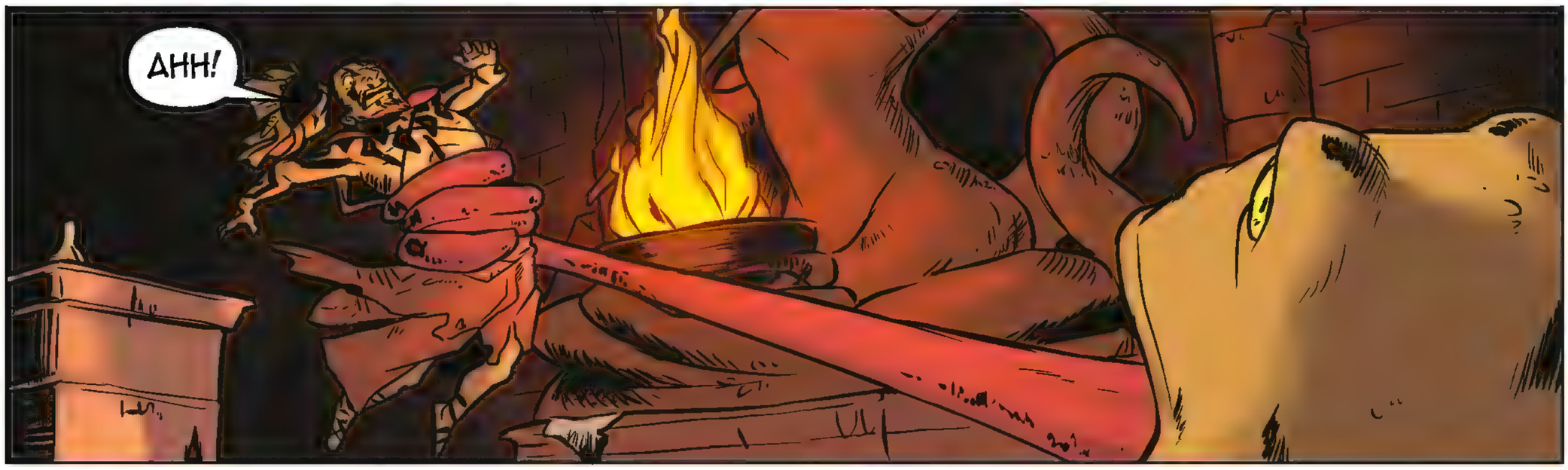

THETOADGODISPISSEDATTHEFISHGOD!
WHAT DID HE SAY?
I THINK HE SAID THE TOEGOT PISSED ON THE FISHGUT!
WHAT'S A TOEGOT?!

HE SAID THE TOAD GOD IS PISSED AT THE FISH GOD!


THE TOAD GOD IS PISSED AT THE FISH GOD...?

BOOM!


THE RITUAL IS BROKEN! AID ME, BROTHERS OF THE...


AHH!
GULP!

SCANLAN! MADE IT THROUGH THE WHOLE BATTLE, DIDN'T FLY INTO A--

--RAGE!!!

URK

SPLA-BOOM!

VENGEANCE!

CHOP

NOW
THAT
WILL MAKE
A GREAT
STORY!

IT WAS RISKY AND STUPID AND YOU GOT LUCKY.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS IF NOT TO TAKE RISKS?!

YOU'LL MEDDLE IN THE UNKNOWN ONCE TOO OFTEN, SCANLAN SHORTHALT.

WHY DO PEOPLE ONLY USE MY FULL NAME WHEN THEY'RE MAD AT ME?

ANYWAY, WE GOT YOUR ARTIFACT AND BONUS LOOT!

YEAH!

MANY POTENT ARTIFACTS RECOVERED. WAND OF LIGNUM VITAE. FOOTWARE OF SORCEROUS ORIGIN. A NECKLACE, SOMEWHAT OBVIOUS ARCANE FUNCTION.

BUT *THIS* POTION I CANNOT IDENTIFY. NO ENCHANTMENT, BUT OBVIOUSLY SIGNIFICANT.

I KNOW JUST THE PLACE!

ALCHEMISTS ARE ALL A LITTLE MAD; NO EYEBROWS, BIRD POOP ON THEIR SHOULDERS. LET ME DO THE TALKING.

YOU DO THE TALKING.

YOU'VE INTERFERED WITH OUR PLANS FOR THE LAST TIME.

I DIDN'T KNOW WE'D INTERFERED ONCE!

YOU HAVE THE WATER. SURRENDER IT TO US.

UM. NO!

THERE'S ONE WAY OUT OF THIS... BUT MYRIAD WAYS TO DIE.

THAT'S A VERY STRANGE THING TO SAY AT THIS MOMENT!

SNAP!

VASH!

HE'S DEAD! THEY KILLED HIM!

YES, WE KNOW! WE SAW IT! WE'RE RIGHT HERE!

GROG! GROG, NOW!

RRAAGGGHHH!

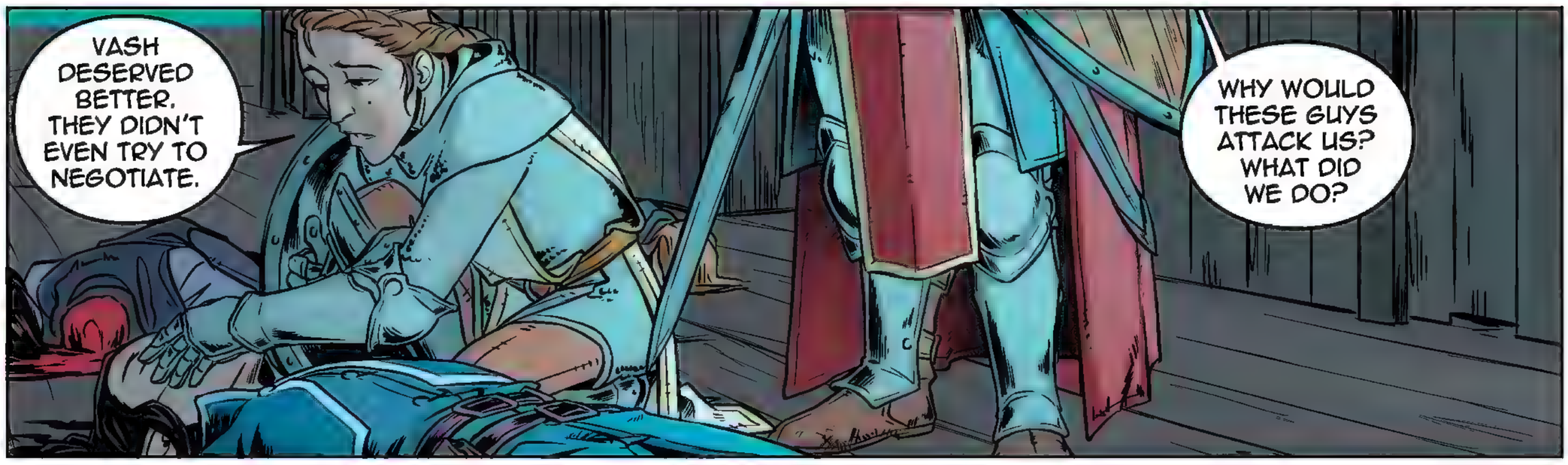
THANK THE GODS, OUR WIZARD HAS REANIMATED AS A POWERFUL LICH! GET 'EM, LICH-VASH!

WHAT? REALLY?

IDIOT.

THAT SUCKED.

I'M GOING TO WRITE A STERNLY WORDED LETTER COMPLAINING ABOUT THE CUSTOMER SERVICE IN THIS PLACE.


VASH DESERVED BETTER. THEY DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO NEGOTIATE.
WHY WOULD THESE GUYS ATTACK US? WHAT DID WE DO?

I DUNNO. WE PISSED SOMEONE OFF.
OH! UM. MAYBE DEY WORK FOR THE FISH-MEN?
ASSASSINS OF THE SHARK GOD? THAT'S RIDICULOUS. I LOVE IT.

SEEMS LIKE THEY THOUGHT THEY KNEW US, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WE WERE COMING HERE. HOW DID THEY?
THE CLASP RUN THE ROTTED LOT. THEY HAVE EYES EVERYWHERE.

THAT SOUNDS UNCOMFORTABLE. THE CLASP, HUH? LET'S SEE.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

BARD STUFF.

CLASP AGENTS HAVE A TATTOO BETWEEN THEIR SHOULDER BLADES.

THEY DO? I DIDN'T KNOW THAT.

LIKE I SAID: BARD STUFF. WE CLEARED OUT THE TEMPLE IN THE SWAMP.

MAYBE THESE GUYS DIDN'T WANT IT CLEARED OUT?

IF SO...I MEAN, WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

GOOD QUESTION! CAN'T WAIT TO FIND OUT!

COME ON. WE'VE GOT BAGS FULL OF TREASURE AND WE'RE IN THE WRONG PART OF A BAD TOWN.

LET'S GET BACK TO THE INN.

WHAT?

HAVE THESE PEOPLE ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS AND I ONLY JUST NOW NOTICED?

LIKE WHAT? MISERABLE? HOPELESS?

YEAH.

ER. I DUNNO ABOUT *ALWAYS*, BUT DEY LIKE THIS EVER SINCE WE BEEN HERE, YEAH.

HUH. FUNNY, ARNICOR NEVER SAID ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

GIRL! WE'RE THE GUYS WHO KILLED THE FISH GOD! THE SEXY GUYS WHO KILLED THE FISH GOD!

WE GOT THE TREASURE FROM THE FISH! GOD! FISH! GOD! FISH GOD! YEOW!

SCANLAN!

COME ON!

CLAP

CLAP - CLAP

SCANLAN! GET OVER HERE!

ONE MOMENT! I SEEK TO CONVERT GOLD INTO URINE VIA THE POPULAR REAGENT, ALCOHOL!

BARKEEP! I NEED ONE FLAGON OF DARK ALE WITH A CHASER, TWO LIGHT ALES FOR THE GOD-BOTHERERS, AND A DRAGON-BREATH ALE FOR MY FRIEND THE BARBARIAN.

RIGHT YOU ARE, SIR, JUST A MOMENT.

PARDON ME, FAIR TROUBADOUR, I COULDN'T HELP BUT OVERHEAR THE SONG YOU WERE SINGING. ARE YOU WITH THE WING?

NO, THEY'RE WITH ME.

THIS IS THE MOST FORTUITOUS LUCK! I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU!

WE DIDN'T DO IT. UNLESS YOU OWE US MONEY, IN WHICH CASE WE *ALREADY* DID IT, YOU CAN PAY US NOW.

NO, NO, IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT. I'M RESEARCHING THE CURSE OF THE SWAMP!

CURSE?

SWAMP?

YES! YOU'RE THE HEROES WHO FOUGHT THE DEMON FISH GOD! EVERYONE IN THE PEASANTS' QUARTER THINKS YOU'RE HEROES.

WE ARE? I MEAN, OF COURSE WE ARE. WHO ARE YOU?

OH, HOW ABSENT-MINDED OF ME. ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE MYSELF.

I AM TIBERIUS STORMWIND, FROM DRACONIA!

OKAY, LET'S JUST... PUT THIS AWAY FOR NOW.

CURRENTLY STAFF SORCERER FOR THE FOUR FROM FORAMERE.

GOOD NAME. I'M SCANLAN, THIS IS GROG, AND THOSE ARE A COUPLE OF ASSHOLES.

ARE YOU SAYING YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE CURSE?

I GUESS WE ARE!

WELL, THEN, WHY WERE YOU FIGHTING THE GHORMALITH IN THE SWAMP?

WE'RE PURSUING A PHILOSOPHY OF ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST.

WE ARE?

WE DEFINITELY ARE.

FORGIVE MY IGNORANCE, BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

WE'RE IN IT FOR THE MONEY.

OH YEAH. ENLIGHTENED SELF-WHATSIT. THAT'S US.

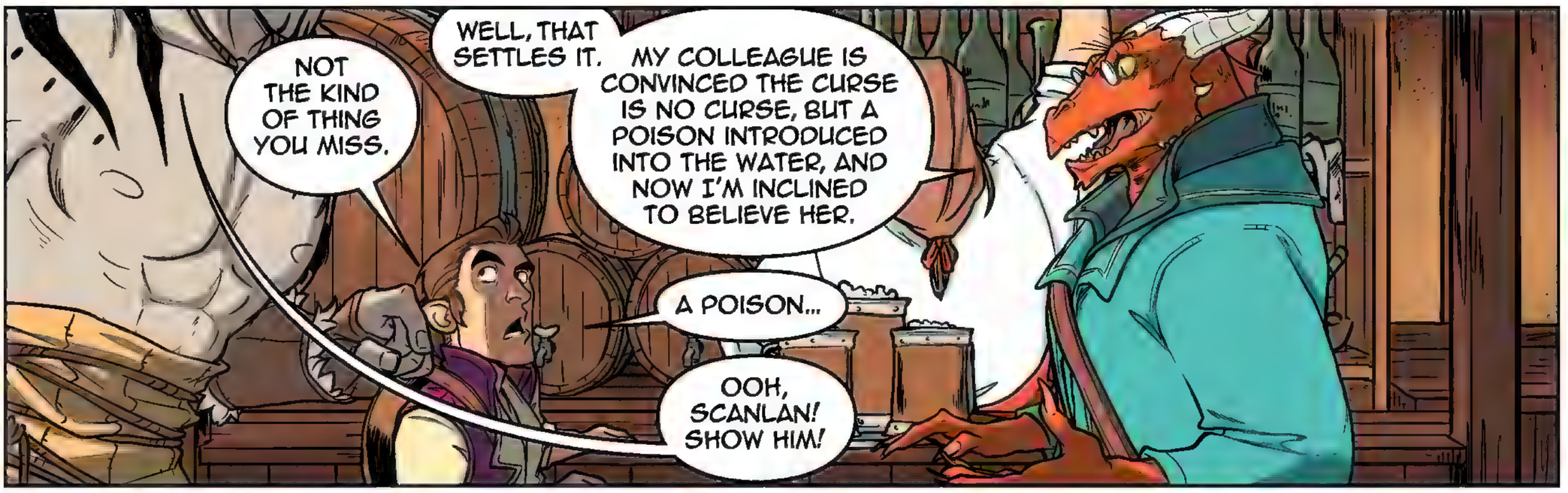
AHH, YOU'RE MERCENARIES! AND THE CULT IS DEFEATED?

YES, IT IS! *AND* I HAVE A RUBY EYE!

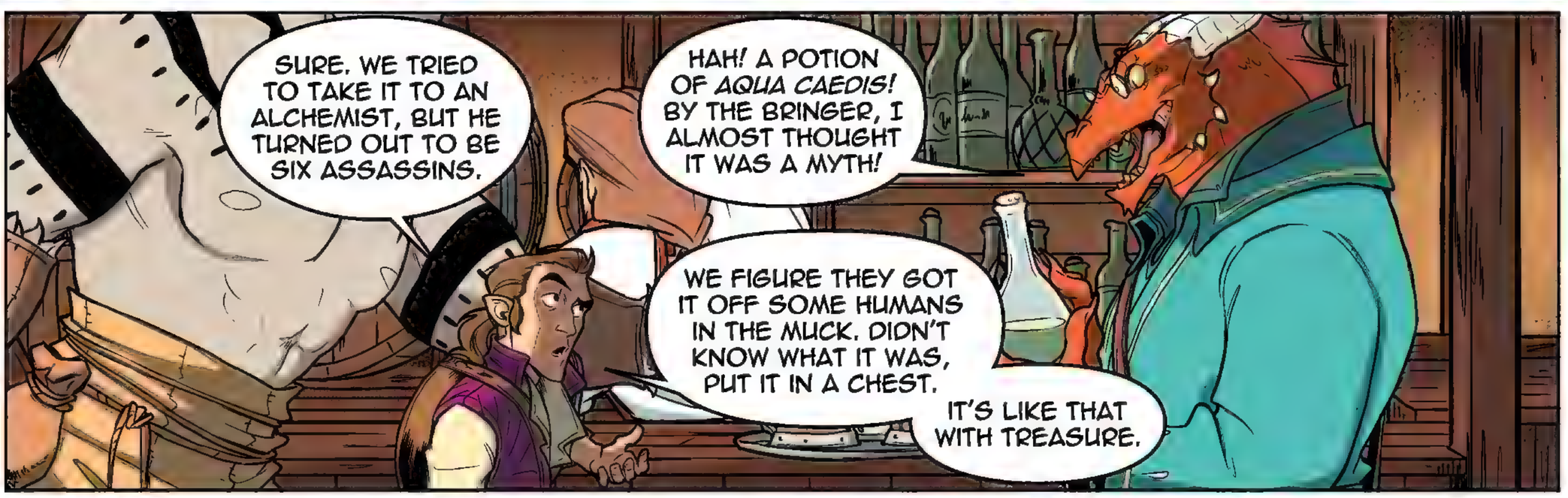
IS THIS...IS THIS A METAPHOR, OR SOME KIND OF MYSTIC THIRD EYE?

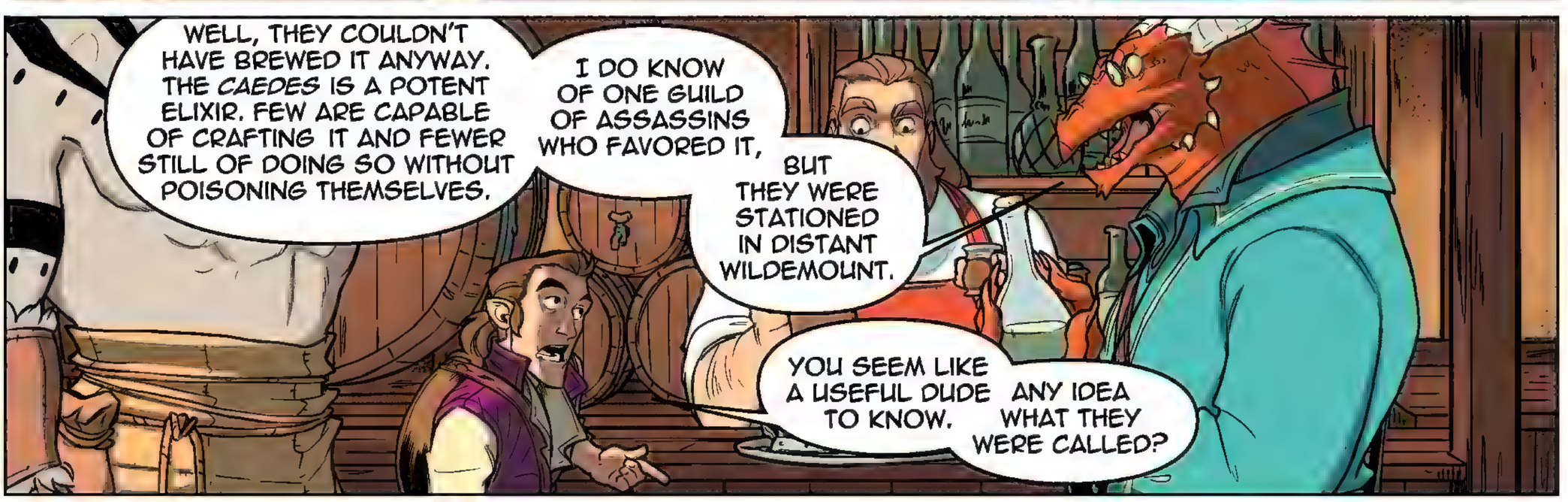
THE EYE IS NOT THE POINT! WHAT IS YOUR QUESTION?

WERE THEY SACRIFICING INFANTS?
NO.
YOU'RE SURE?


NOT THE KIND OF THING YOU MISS.
WELL, THAT SETTLES IT.
MY COLLEAGUE IS CONVINCED THE CURSE IS NO CURSE, BUT A POISON INTRODUCED INTO THE WATER, AND NOW I'M INCLINED TO BELIEVE HER.
A POISON...
OOH, SCANLAN! SHOW HIM!

WELL, THEY HAD THIS.
AHH! ALL MY SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED IN ONE VIAL! MAY I?


SURE. WE TRIED TO TAKE IT TO AN ALCHEMIST, BUT HE TURNED OUT TO BE SIX ASSASSINS.
HAH! A POTION OF *AQUA CAEDIS!* BY THE BRINGER, I ALMOST THOUGHT IT WAS A MYTH!
WE FIGURE THEY GOT IT OFF SOME HUMANS IN THE MUCK. DIDN'T KNOW WHAT IT WAS, PUT IT IN A CHEST.
IT'S LIKE THAT WITH TREASURE.


WELL, THEY COULDN'T HAVE BREWED IT ANYWAY. THE *CAEDES* IS A POTENT ELIXIR. FEW ARE CAPABLE OF CRAFTING IT AND FEWER STILL OF DOING SO WITHOUT POISONING THEMSELVES.
I DO KNOW OF ONE GUILD OF ASSASSINS WHO FAVORED IT,
BUT THEY WERE STATIONED IN DISTANT WILDEMOUNT.
YOU SEEM LIKE A USEFUL DUDE TO KNOW.
ANY IDEA WHAT THEY WERE CALLED?

ALAS, NO. NOT REALLY MY AREA OF EXPERTISE, I'M AFRAID. DO YOU MIND IF I KEEP THIS?

I DO, BUT I DON'T MIND IF YOU ***BUY*** IT FROM ME.

OH. AH. WELL... SOMEWHAT AT A...HERE, WILL THIS DO?

...YOU DRIVE A HARD BARGAIN. SOLD.

THANK YOU SO MUCH! I AM IN YOUR DEBT.

OKAY, WELL, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE US, I'VE GOT TO TELL MY FRIENDS THESE DRINKS ARE MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THEY WERE.

SCANLAN, HOW MUCH DAT ROCK WORTH?

I THINK ABOUT 300 GOLD. I'D LIKE TO TEACH THAT MAN HOW TO PLAY CARDS.

KYMAL.

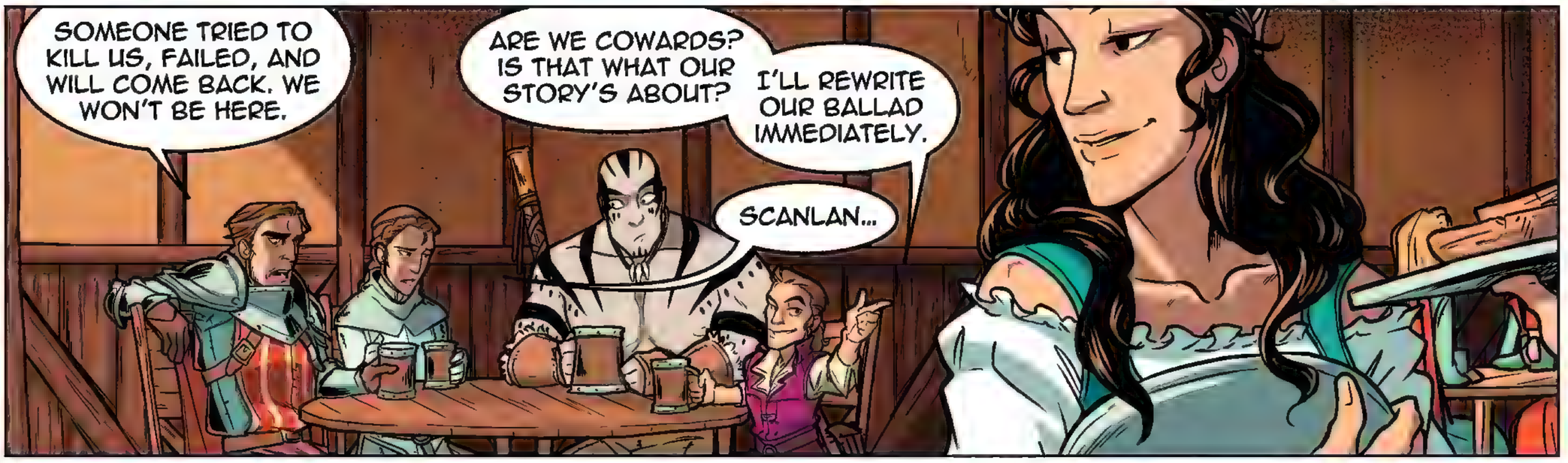
ANK'HAREL.

MMMM... WHITESTONE.

OOOH, WHITESTONE!

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

WE'RE GETTING THE HELL OUT OF HERE. SOON, TONIGHT MAYBE.
BUT WE'RE THE HEROES OF THE CITY! APPARENTLY. I'D LIKE TO ENJOY IT A LITTLE FIRST.
HELLO.
HI.


SOMEONE TRIED TO KILL US, FAILED, AND WILL COME BACK. WE WON'T BE HERE.
ARE WE COWARDS? IS THAT WHAT OUR STORY'S ABOUT?
I'LL REWRITE OUR BALLAD IMMEDIATELY.
SCANLAN...

BRAVE SCANLAN SAID "WE'LL MAKE A STAND!/BUT ARNICOR TURNED AND PISSED HIS PANTS!"
I DO NOT WANT THAT TO BE OUR STORY.
WE GOT THE ARTIFACT BACK FOR THE CHURCH, WE'RE DONE.

YOU WANT TO GO OUR SEPARATE WAYS??
YOU THINK YOU AND ARNICOR COULD HAVE HANDLED THOSE GUYS, THOSE SIX GUYS, ALONE?
YES, THEY RUN THE CITY! THEY RUN THE WHOLE THING. WHY WOULD THEY SEND ASSASSINS AFTER US?
THEY COULD JUST HAVE A WATCHMAN ARREST US!
THE CLASP RUN THIS CITY. IF THEY WANT US DEAD THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO EXCEPT LEAVE.

YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.
WOW, GOOD TIMING.

OFFICER. WHAT'S THE CHARGE?

WE DON'T NEED TO GET INTO THAT RIGHT NOW.

WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO THINK OF SOMETHING WITH YOU FOUR LOCKED IN A CELL.

AND WHAT IF...UH...YOU KNOW, WHAT IF WE DON'T *WANT* TO BE ARRESTED? DERE'S ONLY...ONE OF YOU.

YOU MIGHT BE WILLING TO KILL A WATCHMAN, BUT I BET THESE TWO HOLY INDIVIDUALS AREN'T.

YOU THINK ANYONE IN HERE WILL CARE IF WE GO AT IT? WHOSE SIDE YOU THINK THEY'LL BE ON?

A KNIGHT, OR A CORRUPT WATCHMAN, BOUGHT AND SOLD BY THE CLASP?

OFFICER, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH WE'VE GOTTEN OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT! MY NAME'S SCANLAN SHORTHALT.

THESE GUYS WON'T BE TALKING FOR THE REST OF THE SCENE. WE CAN SKIP THEIR INTRODUCTIONS. I FEEL CERTAIN THERE'S SOME WAY WE CAN, HERE AND NOW, ATONE FOR OUR CRIMES.

AN INTERESTING PROPOSITION.

I'M GLAD WE AGREE! WHAT CAN WE ***REALLY*** HELP YOU WITH?

THE TEMPLE IN THE SWAMP.

ALREADY TAKEN CARE OF. YOU'RE WELCOME.

THERE WAS A PIECE OF TREASURE INSIDE. NOT EVEN TREASURE, NEARLY VALUELESS.

A FLASK. A VIAL. NOT MAGICAL. WITH A CLEAR LIQUID IN IT.

AH, IF YOU DON'T MIND A FRIENDLY THEATRICAL CRITIQUE, I THINK YOU'RE OVERPLAYING YOUR PART A LITTLE.

WE CAN TELL WHATEVER YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS ***INTENSELY*** VALUABLE TO YOU, BUT GIVEN THAT WE GOT FUCK-ALL OUT OF THE TEMPLE, I'M ***CERTAIN*** WE CAN ARRANGE SOMETHING IF YOU'LL BE MORE SPECIFIC.

NOW WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE!
I REMEMBER THE VIAL DISTINCTLY. YOU PICK A PLACE AND TIME, AND WE'LL BE HAPPY TO ARRANGE A TRANSFER.
YOU DON'T HAVE IT WITH YOU.
WELL, WE'RE NOT FOOLS. THIS IS A TAVERN FULL OF ADVENTURERS. TREASURE IS LIKE CHEESE TO A...AH...TINY... ITS GOT WHISKERS...? MOUSE! WOW, IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY.

MIDNIGHT. TONIGHT. THERE'S A SEWER STATION AT COAL ST. AND HARROW.
I'M AFRAID WE REQUIRE PAYMENT IN ADVANCE.
DAT'S TRUE, WE DO.
YOU'RE TRYING TO *BARGAIN* WITH ME?

I'M A CHARISMATIC GNOMISH MINSTREL, IT'S SORT OF EXPECTED.
AND WHAT IF YOU TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN?
LET ME ASK YOU THIS. IS THERE ANYWHERE WE COULD GO IN THIS CITY YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO FIND US?

...NO. THERE ISN'T.
YOU'LL GET THE REST WHEN I GET THE VIAL.
DEAL! IN FOUR HOURS YOU'LL GIVE US THE GOLD AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THAT VIAL.

WE ARE *NOT* GIVING HIM THAT VIAL!

SCANLAN, YOU JUST SOLD THAT VIAL TO THE DRAGONBORN. WE WATCHED YOU.

OH, RIGHT. WE ARE NOT BUYING IT BACK AND SELLING IT TO HIM. *STEALING* IT BACK, ON THE OTHER HAND...

NOPE. WE'RE GETTING OUT OF HERE. OUT OF TOWN. TO WHITESTONE.

YES.

DIDN'T WE TALK ABOUT THIS? *I'M* THE COWARD, NOT YOU GUYS!

YOU WANT TO TAKE ON THE CLASP? HERE?

IT'S NOT THE CLASP! THE CLASP *ACTUALLY* RUN THE WATCH AND *WOULD* HAVE ARRESTED US. I DON'T KNOW WHO THAT WAS, BUT IF HE'S A WATCHMAN, I'M RIMELORD EVERRON.

PLUS IT'S JUST DAT ONE GUY. NOT AFRAID OF ONE GUY. NOT AFRAID OF A WHOLE BUNCH OF GUYS.

WHAT ARE *YOU* AFRAID OF?

SPIDERS.

OH, YEAH. GOOD ANSWER.

AND LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING--WHOEVER THAT ***WAS*** IS MUSCLING IN ON THE CLASP'S TERRITORY. I BET THOSE GUYS WOULD REALLY LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT THAT, DON'T YOU?

USEFUL TO HAVE THE BIGGEST THIEVES' GUILD IN TAL'DOREI OWE US A FAVOR.

HE MAY BE RIGHT. I THINK IF THE CLASP WANTED US DEAD, WE'D BE DEAD. AND ANY SHIPS TO WHITESTONE WON'T LEAVE UNTIL DAWN.

SO WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH OUR IMPOSTER WATCHMAN EITHER WAY.

ALL RIGHT. WELL, IT'S FIVE OF US AGAINST ONE OF HIM...

FOUR. FOUR OF US.

RIGHT. SHIT. SORRY, VASH.

STILL, I LIKE THOSE ODDS! PLUS, WE JUST GOT PAID TWICE FOR THE SAME PIECE OF TREASURE, SO THIS IS OBVIOUSLY NOT A VERY CLEVER PERSON WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

ALL RIGHT, WE'VE GOT FOUR HOURS. SCANLAN, YOU AND GROG SCOUT THIS SEWER STATION OUT. IF THERE'S AN AMBUSH, I WANT TO BE THE AMBUSHER.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

THE DOCKS. IF THIS GOES SOUTH, I WANT TO BE ON A SHIP TO WHITESTONE IN THE MORNING.

DEAL!

WHAT YOU THINKIN' ABOUT?

OH, LOTS OF THINGS. TITS, MOSTLY. ALSO, WHAT IS IN THAT VIAL THAT MAKES IT SO IMPORTANT? POISON? SO WHAT? LOTS OF POISONS AROUND. ALSO, THERE'S A CURSE IN THE POOR PART OF TOWN?

MAYBE SOME-ONE'S POISON-ING THE POOR PEOPLE.

I THINK MAYBE SOMEONE'S POISONING THE... OH. HEY, WELL DONE, GROG!

AW, FANKS, SCANLAN.

BUT, LIKE, ***WHY***? THAT SEEMS A VERY STRANGE THING TO DO...

YAH.

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THAT SORCERER?

THEY WILL SAVE THE WORLD.

SCANLAN SHORTHALT
BARDIC MASTER AKA THE MEAT MAN

GROG STRONGJAW
GRAND POOBAH OF DE DOINK

LORD PERCIVAL FREDRICKSTEIN VON MUSEL KLOSSOWSKI DE ROLO III, SOPHIST OF NATIVE INGENUITY OF WHITESTONE

LADY VEX'AHLIA
GRAND MISTRESS OF THE GREY HUNT

KEYLETH
VOICE OF THE TEMPEST

PIKE TRICKFOOT
CHOSEN OF THE EVERLIGHT

VAX'ILDAN
PALADIN OF THE MATRON OF RAVENS

TIBERIUS STORMWIND
DRAGONBORN SORCERER

GROG STRONGJAW
GOLIATH BARBARIAN

SCANLAN SHORTHALT
GNOME BARD

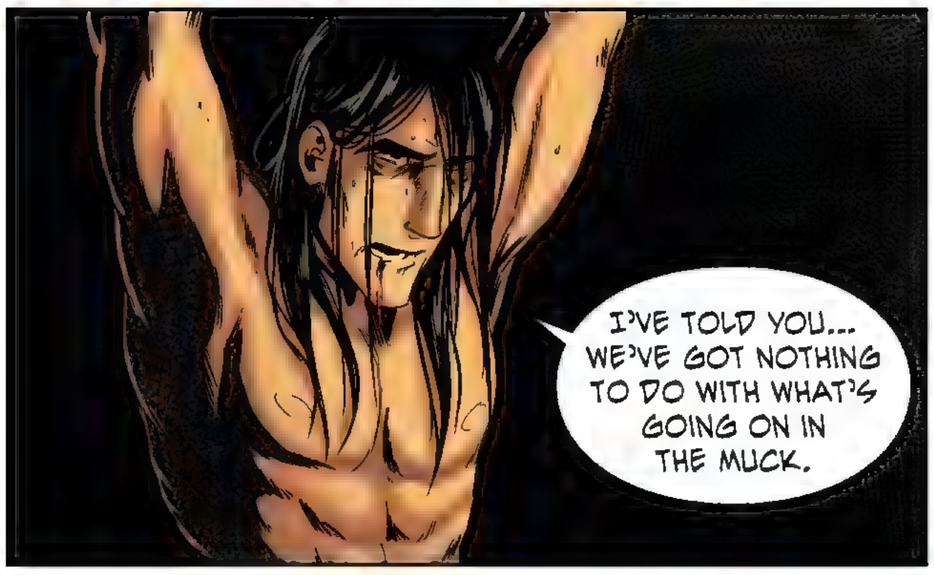
KEYLETH
HALF-ELVEN DRUID

VAX'ILDAN
HALF-ELVEN ROGUE

VEX'AHLIA
HALF-ELVEN RANGER

EVENTUALLY.

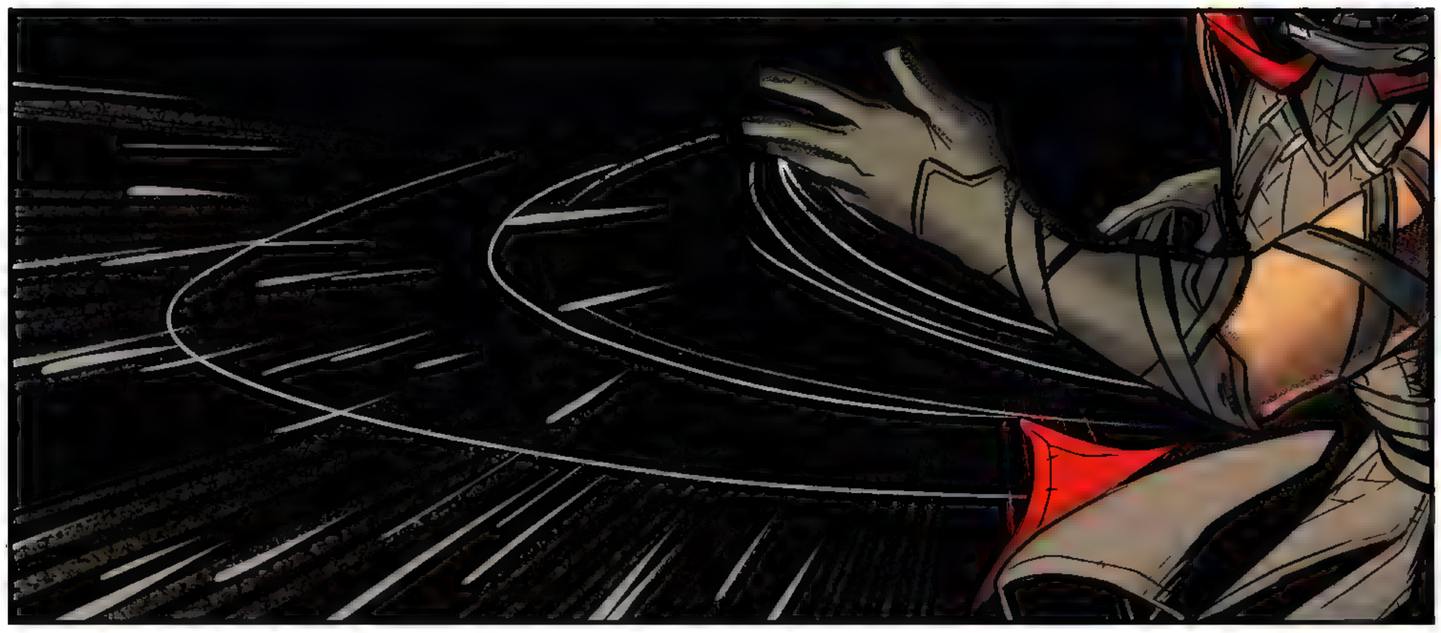
WE ALREADY KNOW WHAT, AND HOW. I JUST WANT TO KNOW *WHY*.


I'VE TOLD YOU... WE'VE GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE MUCK.

MMM...MAYBE. STILL, BETTER TO BE SURE, RIGHT?

NO, NOT THE SALT FOR THIS ONE. THE IRON. GIVE ME THE *FILINGS*.

PLEASE...
YES, I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT GET YOUR ATTENTION.



EAAGGHH!

AHH, THERE'S NOTHING I LOVE MORE THAN BEING *RIGHT*.

I TOLD YOU! ONCE THE CLASP *FASTENS* ONTO YOU, YOU'RE THROUGH.

SPIRELING HARBOR

NOW...THE MUCK.

ANOTHER GUILD. RIVALS. FROM WILDEMOUNT.

THEY HAD A PLAN... KILL EVERYONE IN THE MUCK.

DESTROY YOUR BUSINESS.

ASKED US FOR HELP BUT...

WOULDN'T TELL US... WHO THEY WERE.

NOW *THAT* IS A PLAUSIBLE ANSWER.

I THOUGHT... I WAS TOLD THAT TORTURE... NO ONE DID IT. IT DOESN'T WORK.

AND YOU ***BELIEVED*** THEM? I ASSURE YOU, IT WORKS WONDERS. PROPERLY APPLIED.

IT'S MOSTLY PSYCHOLOGY, I THINK.

THEATER.

HE IS CORRECT, OF COURSE. PSYCHOLOGY AND THEATER. YOU NOTICE I SHOWED THE IRON FILINGS FIRST? MENTIONED THEM?

IT'S THE ANTICIPATION OF PAIN THAT MAKES IT SO UNBEARABLE.

REMEMBER THAT, IN CASE ANY OF YOU ARE EVER STANDING WHERE I AM.

YEAH, I DON'T THINK REMEMBERING THIS IS GOING TO BE A PROBLEM.

NOW THEN, MY PLAUSIBLY DENIABLE AGENTS.

YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING INTO THIS PROBLEM IN THE MUCK FOR THREE DAYS. WHAT HAVE YOU FOUND?

WELL, WE'VE FOUND...

SHIT. WE AIN'T FOUND ***SHIT.***

AND WHY HAVE YOU NOT?

COSTS A LOT TO LOOSEN TONGUES. MORE THAN THE 100 GOLD YOU GAVE US. THINK HOW MUCH IT WOULD GET ***YOU*** TO TALK.

A FAIR POINT, WELL MADE! HERE'S ANOTHER THREE HUNDRED.

THWIP!

I APPRECIATE THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT, BUT IF YOU'RE GOING TO SHAKE SOMEONE DOWN, MAYBE CHOOSE SOMEONE WHO'S NOT YOUR EMPLOYER AND THE HEAD OF THE CITY'S THIEVES' GUILD?

BRUL! WE'RE SURROUNDED BY ASSASSINS. WE'D NEVER MAKE IT OUT ALIVE.

AHH, YOU'RE THE BRAINS OF THE OPERATION, I CAN TELL.

YOU CAN KEEP THE GOLD. IT'S NOT ALL STICKS DOWN HERE, THERE ARE CARROTS, TOO.

YOU KILLED STITCH! WHY THE FUCK SHOULD WE WORK FOR YOU?

OH, HE'S NOT DEAD. JUST UNCONSCIOUS. THE POISON IS BURNING THROUGH HIS VEINS.

IF HE DOESN'T GET THE ANTIDOTE IN TWELVE HOURS *THEN* HE'LL BE DEAD.

UNTIL THEN, HE STAYS HERE WITH ME.

THIS IS NO WAY TO DO BUSINESS.

AH, I THINK YOU'LL FIND THIS IS *EXACTLY* HOW THE CLASP DOES BUSINESS.

YOU KNEW WHO YOU WERE DEALING WITH. DID YOU THINK OUR REPUTATION WAS JUST 'THEATER'?

I REALIZE THIS ISN'T THE PERFECT WAY TO OPERATE. I PREFER LOYALTY AND TRUST, BUT I'LL TAKE ABJECT TERROR IN A PINCH.

THIS IS SERIOUS FOR US, AND NOW I'VE MADE IT SERIOUS FOR ***YOU***. WE NEED THE MUCK.

THOSE PEASANTS ARE HALF OUR NARCOTICS CUSTOMERS AND ONE HUNDRED PERCENT OF OUR PROSTITUTION SUPPLY.

AT THE RATE THEY'RE LEAVING WE'LL BE OUT OF BUSINESS IN A MONTH. THIS IS A ***CRISIS*** AND I TEND TO REACT HARSHLY IN TIMES OF CRISIS, AS YOU JUST SAW.

NOW RUN ALONG. YOU HAVE TWELVE HOURS.

WHAT IF SOMEONE ELSE GETS TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS BEFORE WE DO?

IN MY EXPERIENCE, THE RACE GOES TO THE MOST ***MOTIVATED***.

I HATE YOU SO MUCH RIGHT NOW.

UH-HUH.

THIS IS BECAUSE OF THE SHARK THING, ISN'T IT?

STUBBY, I'M TRYING TO KEEP WATCH. COULD YOU SHUT UP?

IT IS. IT'S BECAUSE YOU ALMOST GOT EATEN BY A SHARK AND YOU THINK IT WAS MY FAULT.

ACTUALLY, I *DID* GET EATEN BY A SHARK, IF YOU REMEMBER, AND IT *WAS* YOUR FAULT.

I KNEW IT. I SHOULD HAVE LET THE SHARK *EAT* YOU.

PLEASE STOP TALKING.

WHY CAN'T WE WATCH FROM THE ROOF LIKE RESPECTABLE... WHATEVER WE ARE?

THEY'RE COVERING THE ROOF. WE GOT HIT FROM THE ROOF.

WHAT ABOUT...

AND THE STREET, SO IT'S THIS OR WE GIVE UP.

FINE, LET'S GIVE UP.

DO YOU REALLY MEAN THAT?

JUST... *FIND* THE ALCHEMIST.

IF YOU INSIST.

WHAT, REALLY?

I'M SURE HE'S BEING WATCHED.

BUT THEY WOULDN'T BE OBVIOUS ABOUT IT. THEY'D LOVE TO CATCH US OUT.

OH, SUDDENLY I'M IN CHARGE.

WELL, THIS IS A CITY! THIS IS YOUR... THING, OR WHATEVER.

WHICH WAY DO WE GO?

JUST SO WE'RE CLEAR ON THE DIVISION OF LABOR AROUND HERE.

VAX, I LOVE YOU. I JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW THAT, BEFORE I KILLED YOU.

HE WAS HEADED EAST. COME ON.

VA

VE

VE

VA

A1

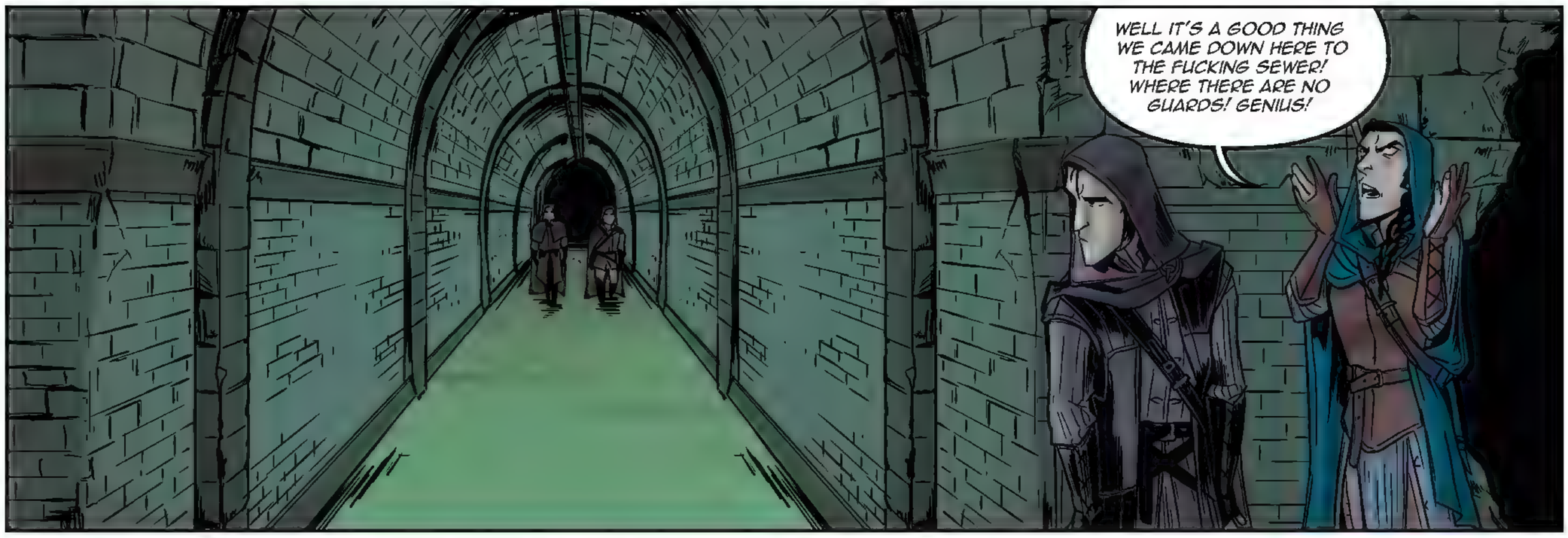
A2

GUARDS.

VA

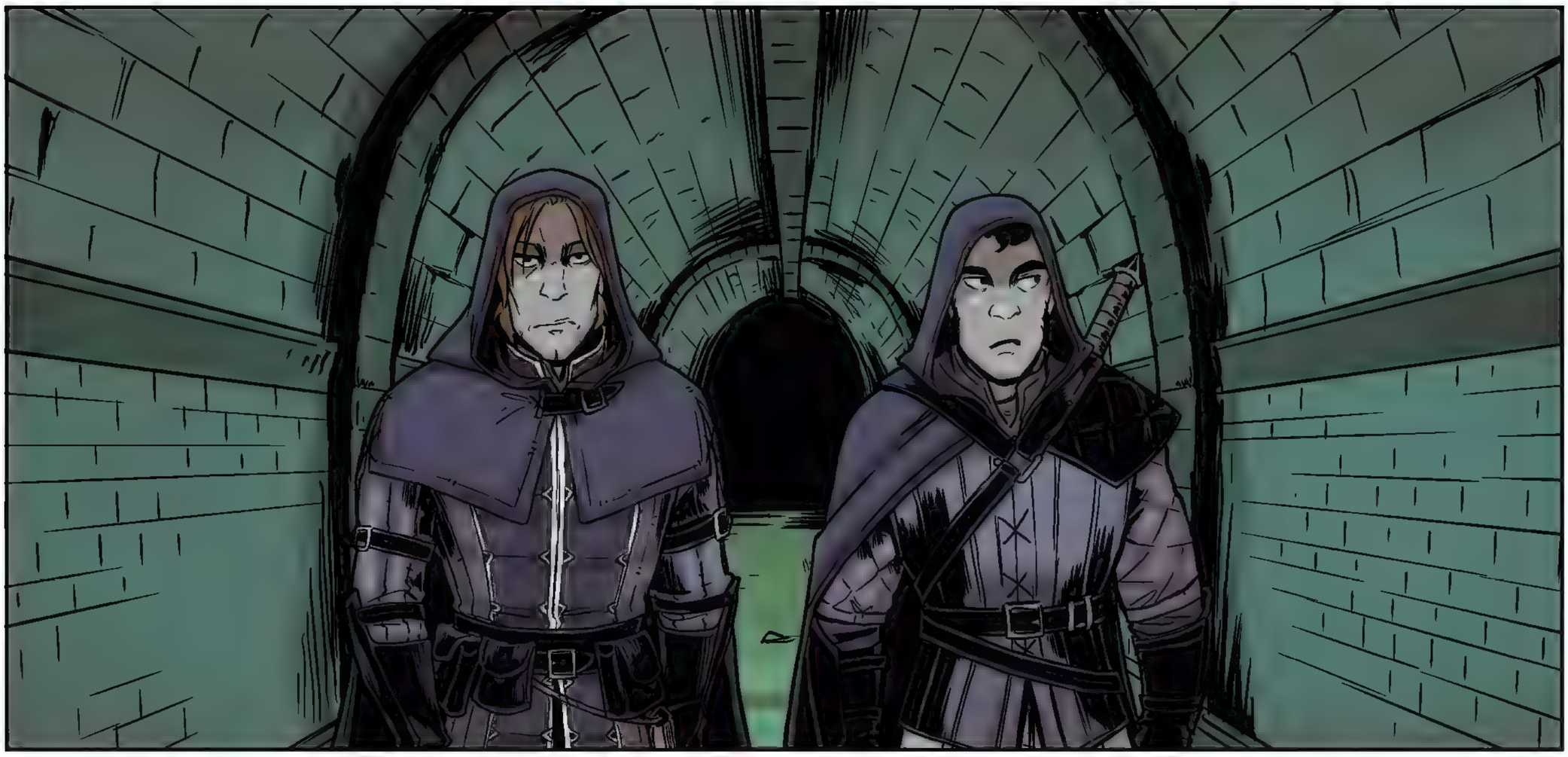
S

VE

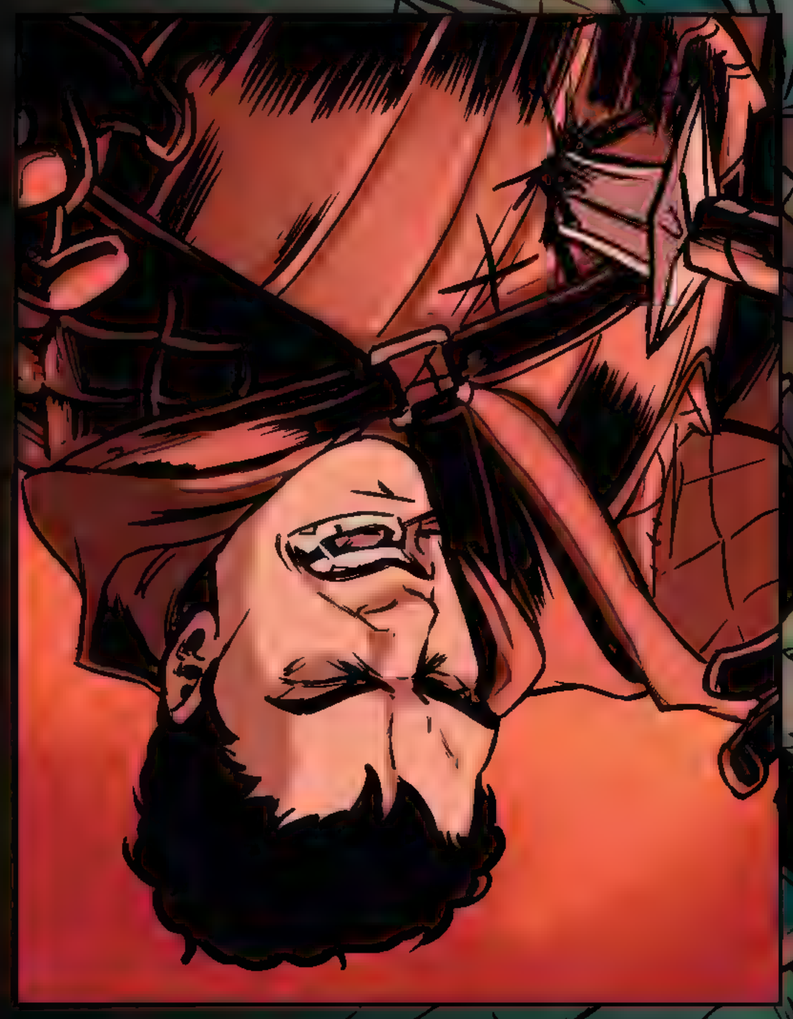

WELL IT'S A GOOD THING WE CAME DOWN HERE TO THE FUCKING SEWER! WHERE THERE ARE NO GUARDS! GENIUS!

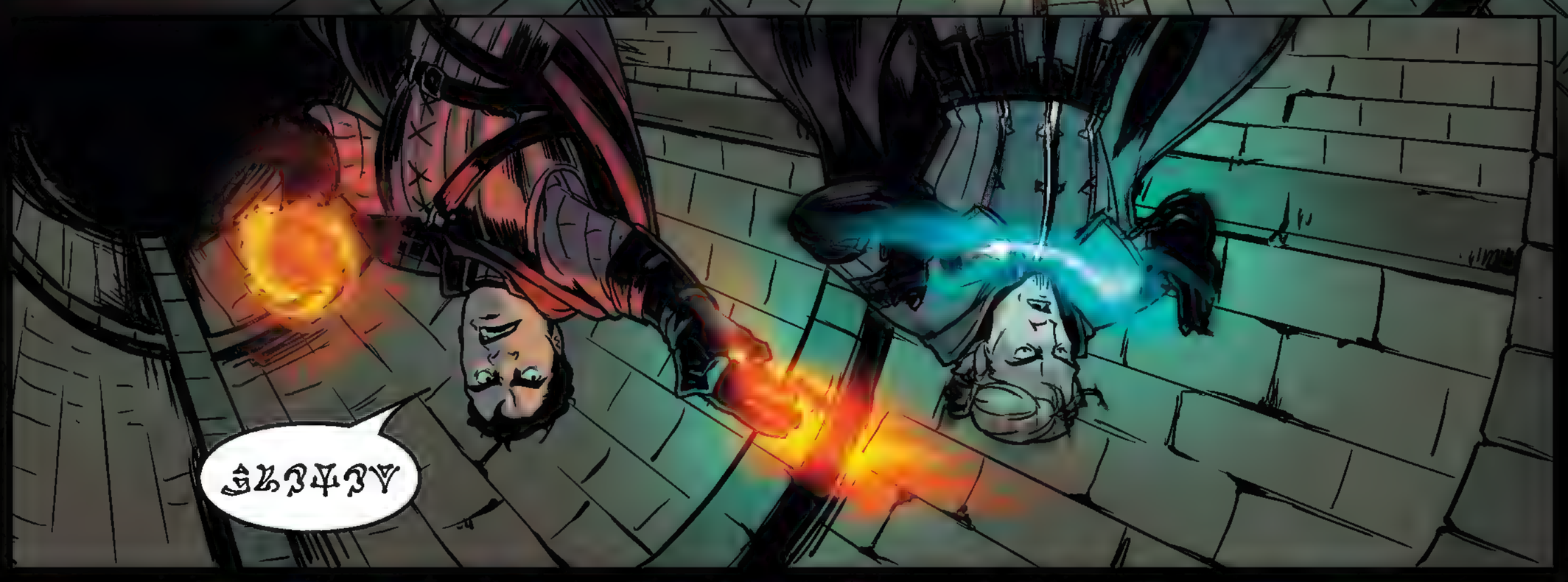
ARE YOU DONE?
YES.

AMBUSH?
AMBUSH.

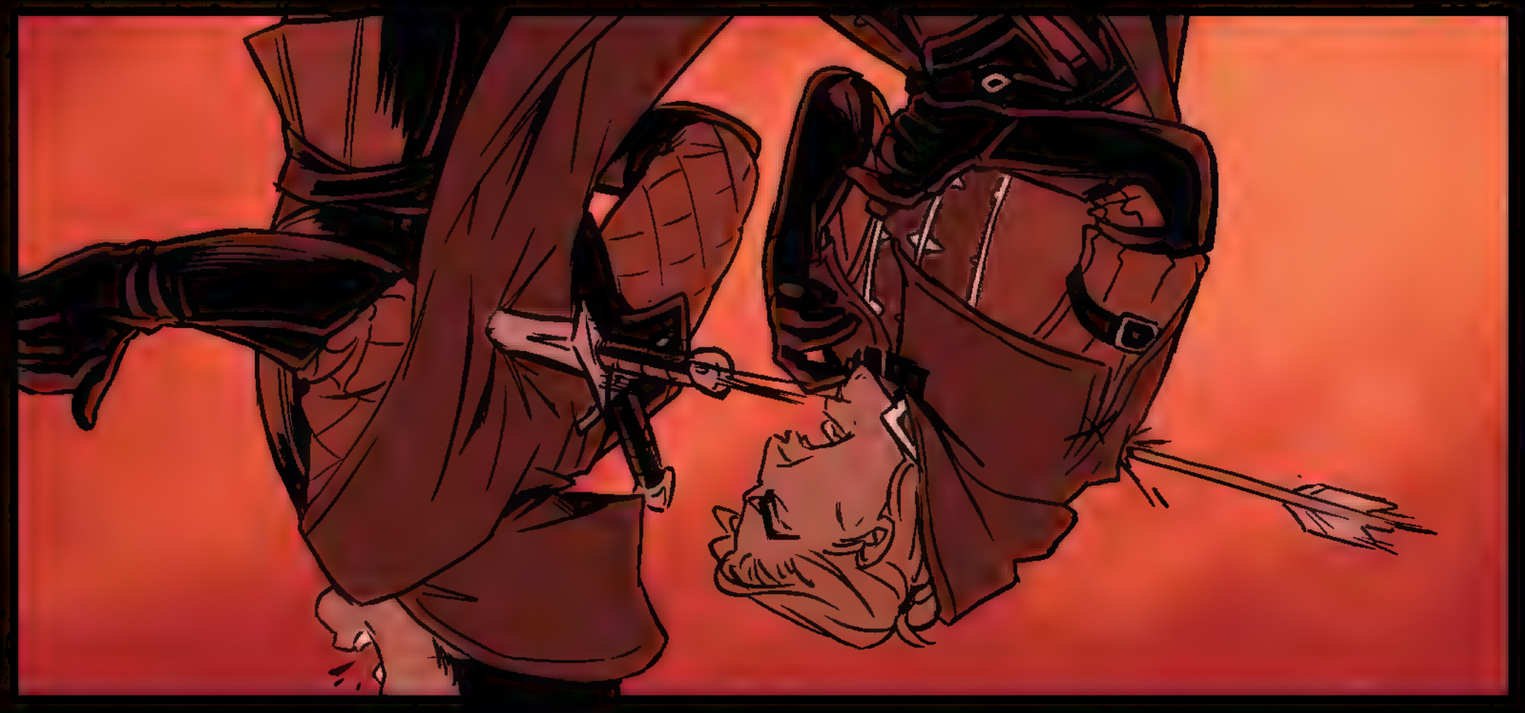


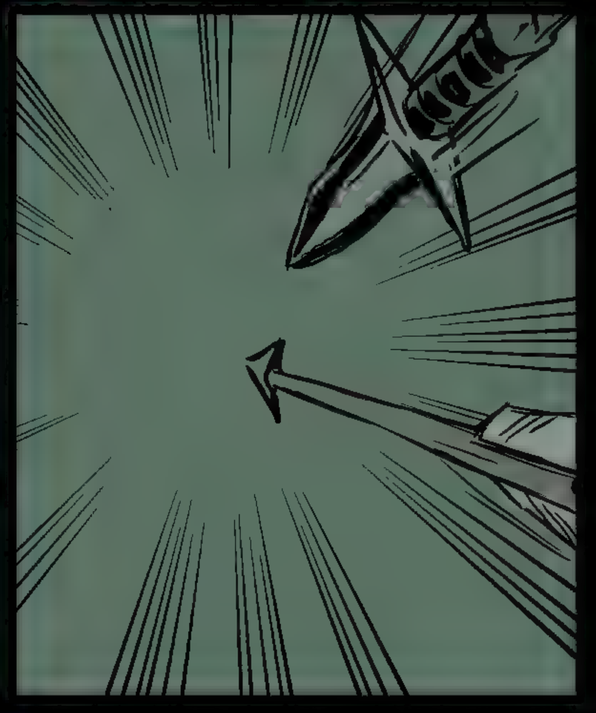
SPLOOSH




ACHEAN

ENEEMI





THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY OUT OF THIS...BUT...

HURK

NICE SHOT!

EH. I GOT LUCKY.

SPELLS. EXOTIC. WE'RE MOVING UP IN THE WORLD.

SORCERER-ASSASSINS. IF THEY'D STUCK TO ONE JOB EACH, MAYBE WE'D BE IN TROUBLE.

LET'S GRAB THEIR OUTFITS. WE CAN FOLLOW ZETH DISGUISED AS THEM.

YOU'RE SAYING WE SHOULD DISGUISE OURSELVES AS *OURSELVES*, BUT POORER.

...

I GET EXCITED SOMETIMES. COME ON, WE HAVE TO CATCH UP TO ZETH.

I JUST WANTED TO HELP PEOPLE. I THINK I'M GOING TO BE SICK.

WE GET THIS CURSE SORTED, YOU'LL BE HELPING SOMEONE ALL RIGHT. STITCH.

WE SHOULD HAVE TOLD SPIRELING HARROK WHAT WE KNEW.

WE DON'T KNOW SHIT.

WE KNOW THE MUCK ISN'T CURSED. THOSE PEOPLE ARE BEING POISONED.

DON'T MAKE NO SENSE. AIN'T ENOUGH POISON IN THE WHOLE CITY.

NORMALLY, BRUL, I'D AGREE WITH YOU, AS REMARKABLE AS THAT SOUNDS. BUT THIS IS NO NORMAL POISON.

THIS IS THE *AQUA CAEDES*. THE WATER OF DEATH. APTLY NAMED, I'M AFRAID.

HOW COME WE AIN'T NEVER HEARD OF IT?

THE *AQUA CAEDES* IS DISTILLED FROM THE EXCRETIONS OF THE HERMIT SLUG, FOUND IN TIDEPOOLS NEAR WILDEMOUNT.

THAT'S THE ***ONLY*** WAY IT CAN BE MADE.

THIS IS IMPORTED. IT IS RARE AND EXPENSIVE, THE SUPPLY SO SMALL MOST THINK IT LEGENDARY.

AND YOU ONLY NEED A SWIG OF THAT TO POISON AN ENTIRE SWAMP? IT'S MILES ACROSS!

A SKILLED ALCHEMIST COULD DILUTE IT AND PAIR IT WITH A BINDING REAGENT, TURNING ONE BOTTLE INTO A DOZEN.

AND YES, POISON THE ENTIRE SWAMP, ONE DOSE AT A TIME, UNTIL THE NEXT SHIPMENT ARRIVES.

AN ALCHEMIST, HUH? WHICH ONE, I WONDER?

WHOEVER IT IS, OUR ENEMY FROM WILDEMOUNT WOULD HAVE THEM CLOSELY GUARDED.

IT'D BE IMPOSSIBLE TO...

GIVE ME THE WATER.

AS YOU WISH. BE CAREFUL, LADY.

ALL RIGHT, I CAN FIND IT. IF YOU'RE RIGHT AND IT'S ONLY BEING BREWED IN ONE PLACE.

YOU CAN FIND IT? BUT HOW?

FWOOOSH!

OH YES, OF COURSE. EXCELLENT.

ALL RIGHT, ME AND BRUL, GONNA HEAD DOWN TO THE MUCK, SEE IF WE CAN CATCH SIGHT OF ANYONE CURSING OR POISONING ANYONE. YOU TWO... FOLLOW YOUR NOSE.

I COMPLETELY AGREE. I FIND THE ENTIRE LOT OF THEM UTTERLY REPELLENT, PRESENT COMPANY EXCLUDED, OF COURSE.

WOOF!

OH, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

SOMEWHAT AT A LOSS AS TO WHAT CAN BE DONE, HOWEVER.

GROWL.

WELL THAT SEEMS EXTREME, BUT I AGREE WITH THE SENTIMENT.

THE SCENT IS GETTING FRESHER, RIGHT?

WUF.

GOOD. I WAS WORRIED WE MIGHT BE GOING BACKWARD.

THIS CONVERSATION WOULD BE SOMEWHAT LESS ABSURD IF I COULD UNDERSTAND YOU.

WOOF.

OH, REALLY? I HADN'T CONSIDERED THAT.

I'VE GOT IT. NEXT SHIPMENT... ARRIVING THIS MORNING... ONBOARD THE *MOCKINGBIRD*. IT MIGHT ALREADY BE DOCKED.

OH, THANKS VERY MUCH.

WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?!

I MEAN...DOES THAT MATTER? IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS?

SO...I GUESS THAT'S IMPORTANT.

YOU'LL NEVER GET IT! YOU'LL HAVE TO KILL ME!

SWIPE.

OKAY.

SC ZZ
VE VA$
GR
WHO AM I TO ARGUE?
DID YOU REALLY KILL HIM?
NAH, HE'S JUST ASLEEP.
LOTTA THESE... BOOK THINGS IN HERE.
YEAH, BUT I THINK WE GOT THE ONLY BOOK THAT MATTERS.
AREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO BE...
...MEETIN' SOMEONE?
HOLY SHIT!
TWO OF 'EM!
OKAY, SO YOU'RE NOT...

OW, HEY!

WE NEED THAT BOOK, GNOME.

AARGH!

MOTHER FUCKER! UM...GROG?

YOU HURT MY FRIEND!

RRRAAAGH!

HNG!

OKAY, YOU'RE ON IT. GOOD.

YOU HURT MY BROTHER!

THAT'S RIGHT! YOU'VE BEEN...

THUNDERSTRUCK!

HEY, LOOK... OW!

UM, DIDN'T WE KILL YOU GUYS?

IT'S ALL RIGHT, WE ALREADY FOUGHT THESE GUYS. THEY'RE PUSHOVERS.

THHMP!

...OOOW!

SCANLAN! WE'RE OUTNUMBERED THIS TIME SCANLAN! *OW!* I THINK!

'PUSHOVERS.'

LISTEN, I'M...WE'RE NOT DONE! I'LL HAVE SOME VERY...CUTTING WORDS FOR YOU WHEN THIS IS ALL OVER, YOU WAIT AND SEE.

IF YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, BARD. WHY DON'T YOU GO SING A SONG OR SOMETHING?

HEY! WHY DON'T YOU GO...BE A STINKY PERSON WHO SMELLS... LIKE A BUTT!

UGH.

IS THAT...WOW, DID THE OTHER GUYS LET YOU GO OUT LIKE THAT?

WHAT? LIKE... WHAT?

WELL, HAVE YOU SEEN WHAT THEY'RE WEARING?

Y-YEAH?

LOOK AT 'EM. ALL... BLACK AND COOL. THAT HALFLING GOT HIS OUTFIT TAILORED. MAKES HIM LOOK BUFF.

WOW, YEAH IT DOES. I DIDN'T NOTICE...

AND THE ELF, WHAT IS THAT, SILK? I BET IT'S SILK. THAT HAS TO BE EXPENSIVE.

HE...HE'S SENIOR, MAN, HE CAN AFFORD IT.

I MEAN, I'M SURE YOU'RE DOING YOUR BEST. IT'S JUST...

I KNOW. THEY TOLD ME I HAD TO PROVIDE MY OWN OUTFIT, BUT...

I CAN TELL. LOOK, I DON'T WANT YOU TO FEEL BAD, BUT WHEN YOU DON'T TAKE THIS SERIOUSLY...

LISTEN, I'M DOING MY BEST, OKAY?! YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A SHIT ABOUT IT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE!

I KNOW I'M NEW, AND I'M NOT... YOU KNOW, I DON'T HAVE MONEY LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, BUT...

"WHY DON'T YOU GO SING A SONG?" "WHY DON'T YOU GO PAINT YOUR ROOM BLACK, YOU EMO BALLBAG?" YEAH!

WHERE'D THAT HALF-ELF GO?

HEY! ASSHOLE!

OH SHIT...

...WE'RE LOSING.

HEY!

I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER THAT NEXT TIME YOU'RE TRYING TO KILL ME!

OKAY, THIS IS BETTER! BUT WE'RE STILL DEFINITELY GOING TO DIE!

THWANG

I'VE DECIDED TO PUT OFF DEALING WITH YOU UNTIL AFTER WE FINISH DYING.

I'M NOT ONE OF THE BAD GUYS, ASSHOLE! ACTUALLY, THAT'S NOT ENTIRELY TRUE IF YOU COUNT...AH, FUCK IT.

ᛖᛃᛈᛋᚨ ᛏᛃᛈᛋᚨ ᛏᛈᛃᛋᚨᚾᛚᚢ

I'M PRETTY CONFUSED RIGHT NOW.

YEAH, I THINK THERE'S A LOT OF PLOT THREADS SORT OF CONVERGING IN THIS SCENE.

USUALLY WHEN THAT HAPPENS NOT EVERYONE...

SQUEEK

...SURVIVES.

WELL, THERE'S A LOT OF SMELLS DOWN HERE, OKAY? IT'S EASY TO LOSE...SOMEONE.

THE DRUID!

THE SORCERER!

OH, IT'S THE TWINS! WOW, I'M *REALLY* GLAD YOU GUYS ARE STILL ALIVE!

I SAY!

AHEM.

OH MY GOD I LOVE THIS GUY!

IT'S OKAY, THEY'RE ON OUR SIDE.

?

JINX! ONETWOTHREE NO TAKEBACKS!

YOU OWE ME A DRINK!

WE WILL! WE WILL! FUCK YOU!

WAIT! NOT IN THE FACE!

THESE PEOPLE ARE SO *DUMB*.

SO...DID ANYONE NOTICE HOW ALL OF A SUDDEN THERE WERE SIX ASSASSINS IN HERE EVEN THOUGH NONE OF THE DOORS OPENED?

THAT'S WHERE DOSE ASSASSINS CAME FROM! I *SAW* IT!

IT'S NOT MAGICAL. NO IDEA WHY I BOTHERED LEARNING THAT SPELL.

GROG, ARE YOU SURE THEY WEREN'T JUST HIDING IN THE...

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING DONE RIGHT...

AAUUGH! STOP IT!

UGN!

YOU SHOULD HAVE RUN WHILE YOU HAD THE CHANCE.

I KNOW *MYRIAD* WAYS TO KILL YOU.

THE MYRIAD! FROM WILDEMOUNT! THAT'S IT!

OH. ACTUALLY I THINK WE'RE IN QUITE A LOT OF TROUBLE!

AARRRRGGH!

RRAAAGH!

DON'T WORRY. GROG'S PISSED. HE'S REAL PISSED. WE'RE OKAY.

ONCE HE GETS LIKE THAT, NOTHING CAN...

OKAY, *YOU* HAVE TO GO.

STAND BY. I SENSE SOME NEFARIOUS BULLSHIT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN.

?!

WE'RE FUCKED.

TESS
2017

HOLY SHIT, MAYBE WE DON'T NEED GROG.

AAAGGH!

WE NEED GROG.

PARDON ME, YOUNG LADY.

FRIENDS ARE HARD TO COME BY AROUND HERE. I'D APPRECIATE YOU NOT EVISCERATING MINE.

THIP!

THIP!

THUP!

I SAY!

SCANLAN! GEMME OUTTA HERE!

HOW...WHAT...I'M NOT... THERE ARE LIMITS TO THE POWER OF MUSIC!

HEHEHE

UH-OH.

ZZZT!!!

SCANLAN!

LITTLE *OTHLIR*.

SO BRAVE.

I GUESS THAT COMES NATURALLY TO THE BASTARD OFFSPRING OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT.

GET FUCKED.

THUD

GULP

YOU'RE LIKE CHILDREN. BUT THIS ISN'T A PLAYGROUND, AND I DON'T USE TOYS.

NONONO, *FUCK!* I HATE IT WHEN THEY USE *MY* TREASURE BEFORE I CAN KILL THEM AND LOOT IT!

CRASH!

WATCH OUT! SHE'S GOT...AN ACORN?

CRACK

UNGH!

SHIT, SORRY!

I'M GONNA DIE.

BITCH, LEAVE MY FRIENDS ALONE!

I'M GONNA DIE HERE IN THE DARK WITH GROG AND A BUNCH OF ASSHOLES.

I COULD USE A HEALER. NEVER THOUGHT I'D MISS ARNICOR AND THURISTA. AT LEAST SHE HAD THAT WAND OF... OH, MY GOD.

VAX!

LIGHT!

AH-AAAHHHH! I HAVE A WAND OF DAYLIGHT!

CREEK

IS IT OVER? YOU DIDN'T SAY HOW LONG I SHOULD WAIT, SO I...

YOU!

SHIT.

WHUUM

FUCK... HER!

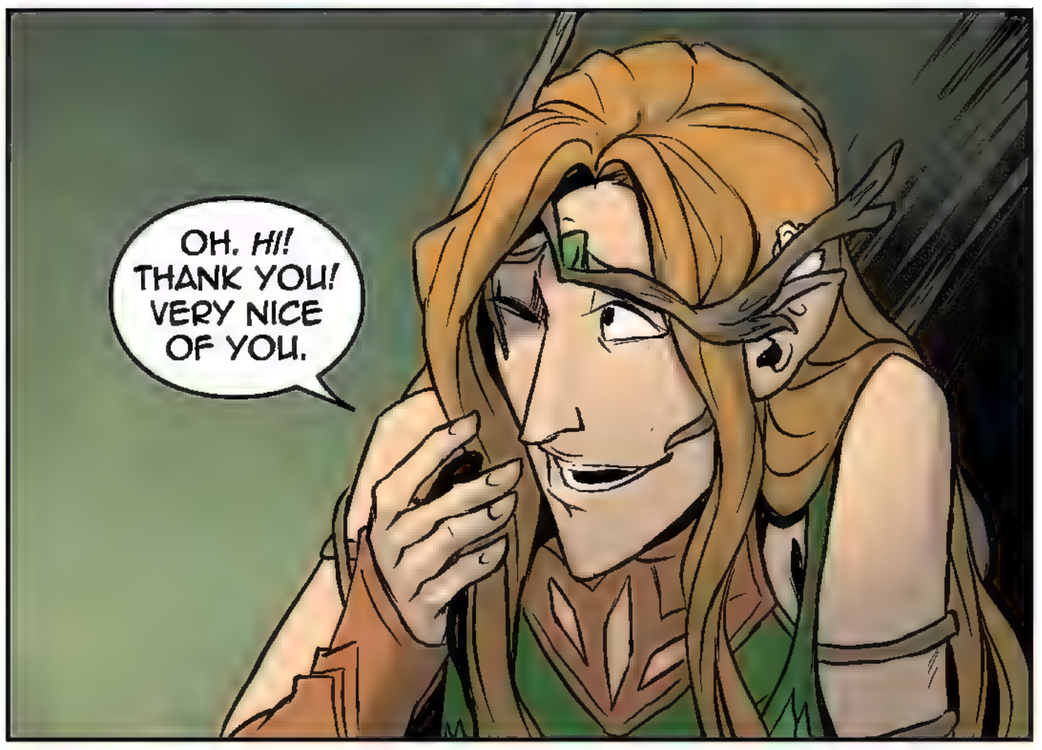
OW.

CRASH

HEY, ASSHOLE. YOU'RE ALIVE.

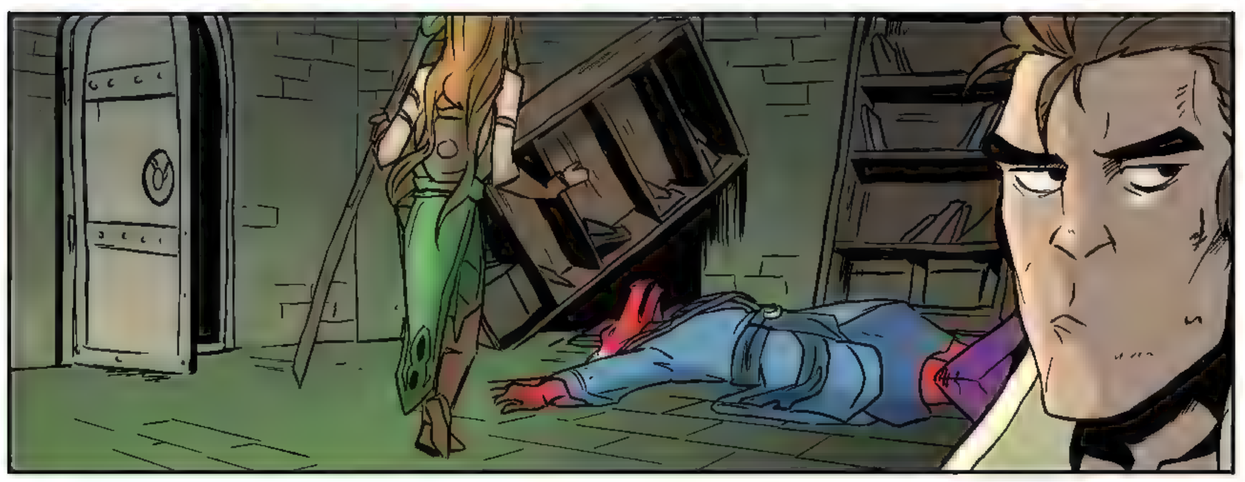
YOU LET HER ESCAPE.

I LET...! OOOHOHOH. WHEN I TELL THIS STORY I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU LOOK LIKE *SUCH* A COCKBAG!


OH. *HI!* THANK YOU! VERY NICE OF YOU.

HEY, TIGER-LADY. I'M *EXTREMELY* NICE. ESPECIALLY FROM THE WAIST DOWN.

WHAT? OH, EXCUSE ME.



GROG, COULD YOU PLEASE UN-FUCK YOUR-SELF?

PLOP!

HEY, FANKS, SCANLAN!

I THINK IT JUST WORE OFF ON ITS...I MEAN...YOU'RE WELCOME.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ALCHEMIST?

SHE SNATCHED HIM. HE WAS BAIT. THEY USED THE ALCHEMIST AS BAIT TO LURE US ALL IN HERE.

OKAY, WHO'S US? BY WHICH I MEAN, WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU PEOPLE?

THIS IS VEXAMA-CALLIT AND VAXISTAN OR SOMETHING. THEY'RE TWINS!

OH, SHE'S WITH ME. WE'RE WITH THE FOUR FROM FORAMERE. EXCEPT THERE'S FIVE OF US FOR SOME REASON.

WONDER-FUL. WHO ARE YOU?

WHO DO YOU PEOPLE WORK FOR?

I WONDERED THAT MYSELF, FRANKLY. INTRODUCTIONS FIRST!

ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST!

I'M GROG. DIS IS SCANLAN. WE'RE GREEDY.

SAME FING, APPARENTLY.

HELLO! MY NAME IS TIBERIUS STORMWIND, FROM DRACONIA!

SWISS

THAT'S JUST A THING HE DOES. LIKE, TO EVERYONE. YOU CAN PROBABLY SHAKE IT, IT WON'T GO OFF.

SLIP

WOW. SHE... SHE TOOK THE CAP OFF AN ACORN, DROPPED A SEED IN THERE WITH DARKNESS CAST ON IT--

--PUT THE CAP BACK ON BLOCKING THE DARKNESS. THAT'S COMPLETELY BRILLIANT. WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT? LITTLE DARKNESS BOMB IN YOUR POCKET.

ENOUGH. WE NEED THE BOOK, GNOME.

OR WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO? STAB ME AGAIN?

SCHIK

OW! YOU ASSHOLE!

HAHAHAHA! HE DID IT! HE POKED YOU WITH HIS POKEY STICK! HAHAHAH!

GROG! WOULD YOU PLEASE... WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?!

OH, RIGHT. UM, HEY. DON'T DO THAT AGAIN. UNLESS YOU *REALLY* WANT TO...

LISTEN, STOP... HANG ON.

FFFX

BETWEEN US, WE KNOW WHERE THEY ARE, WE KNOW HOW THEY'RE POISONING THE CITY. WE EACH FOUND HER... WHOEVER SHE IS... ONCE. TOGETHER WE CAN...

TOGETHER WE CAN ALL GET KILLED! WHICH WE ALMOST JUST DID! WHICH WE *WOULD* HAVE DONE, IF WE HADN'T GOTTEN LUCKY!

WHAP

THIS IS A WASTE OF TIME.

I AGREE COMPLETELY.

WE NEED YOUR HELP. WE NEED *EVERYONE'S* HELP. I THINK HAVING YOU TWO ON OUR SIDE WOULD BE GOOD.

IT MIGHT BE TO YOUR *BENEFIT.*

BUT IT WOULD NOT BE *GOOD.*

WOW! THOSE GUYS ARE COOL. YOU THINK THEY PRACTICE THAT SHIT? WHO WRITES THEIR DIALOGUE, I WONDER?

EVEN THE FOUR OF US. IF WE JOIN FORCES...

THUD

NOPE! GOODBYE, STRANGE PEOPLE! WE'VE GOT ENOUGH IDIOTS IN OUR LIVES; WE DON'T NEED ANY EXTRAS.

BUT WE CAN HELP.

I VERY MUCH DOUBT THAT!

SLAM

WHAT A STRANGE LITTLE GNOME.

I DUNNO, I SORT OF LIKE HIM.

YES, WELL, YOU LIKE EVERY-BODY.

THAT'S NOT TRUE.

I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW HUMILIATING IT IS TO BE BEATEN BY A BUNCH OF COCKROACHES.

YOU SAW THAT?

OF COURSE. THE MIRROR WORKS BOTH WAYS. IT'S SO ENTERTAINING, WATCHING YOU FAIL.

EVERYTHING IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN.

YOU'RE SUCH AN ACCOMPLISHED LIAR, I FIND MYSELF ALMOST BELIEVING YOU.

I PROMISED YOU A FOOTHOLD IN TAL'DOREI. I WILL EFFECT THE TRANSFER OF STILBEN FROM THE CLASP'S HANDS INTO OURS, ACCORDING TO THE TIMETABLE YOU LAID OUT.

YES!

ALL THAT. ALONE?

IT'S GETTING LATE. YOU WOULDN'T WANT MORE TIME? MORE HELP?

YOU'RE TRYING TO BARGAIN WITH ME. IT WON'T WORK. I KNOW THE PRICE OF YOUR DIPLOMACY.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF ETERNITY, ISELDA. WE HAVE MYRIAD TORTURES AND TORMENTS TO STOP YOU GETTING BORED.

YES, YES. YOU WIN EITHER WAY. BUT SOON WE'LL HAVE STILBEN. AND I ADVANCE IN RANK. AND THEN WE ARE EQUALS.

WE WILL NEVER BE EQUALS. I WATCHED THOSE VERMIN NEARLY OVERWHELM YOU.

I MASTERED THEM EASILY. TO PROTECT THE NETWORK, I HAD TO GET ZETH TO SAFETY.

NEXT TIME SHOULD BE MORE FUN.

THERE WON'T BE A NEXT TIME.

I HAVE EVERYTHING I NEED.

YOU WANNA SEE A SHOW? WATCH THIS.

WE JUST NEED HELP.

HAH! LIKE WHO? THOSE IDIOTS WHO JUST LOST? FACE IT, BROTHER, ANYONE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO HELP US WON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST...WHOEVER SHE IS.

WE'RE A TEAM, WE TOOK A JOB. WHY ARE YOU FIGHTING ME ON THIS?

ALL RIGHT, I'LL SAY IT.

I'M AFRAID...I'M AFRAID THE ONLY REASON YOU'RE DOING THIS IS BECAUSE YOU THINK YOU CAN COUNT ON ME NO MATTER WHAT.

YES!

AND YOU'LL PUSH THIS ***ANYWHERE*** BECAUSE YOU THINK NO MATTER WHAT, WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER.

WE ARE.

RIGHT. SO IT'S UP TO ME TO LEAVE.

VEX!

I JUST...I DON'T WANT TO FAIL.

WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GET USED TO FAILURE, BROTHER.

BASH

VAX!

WHUUP

HEHE HEHE...

SMASH

HAHAH!

YOU BITCH!

AHAHA-

YOU FUCKING HAG!

VAX!!

THUD

TORTURE, MISTRESS?

NO. WELL, NOT THE KIND YOU MEAN. NO, WE'LL JUST LEAVE HIM HERE. SEE WHO TURNS UP.

BAIT, IS THAT IT? SNATCH ME TO LURE THE OTHERS?

IF YOU LIKE.

WHO... WHAT ARE YOU?

YOUR ENEMY. THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW. ACTUALLY, IT JUST OCCURRED TO ME. THERE IS A VERY SLIGHT CHANCE YOU'LL LIVE THROUGH THIS.

I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME ABOUT YOU.

HAHAHA. BRAVELY SAID. THE CLASP HAVE RESOLUTELY FAILED TO DO ANYTHING TO STOP ME...EXCEPT SEND YOU IDIOTS. AND ALL YOU DID WAS FIND ME.

BUT THAT PUTS YOU HEAD AND SHOULDERS ABOVE THE REST OF THE CITY.

THERE MAY BE A PLACE FOR YOU IN OUR NEW ORGANIZATION.

NOT MUCH OF A JOINER, ME.

WELL, YOU CAN TALK IT OVER WITH THOSE OTHER INSECTS WHEN THEY ARRIVE.

REGARDLESS. I'LL SETTLE FOR YOUR SISTER.

GOOD LUCK. THE ONLY REASON WE DIDN'T KILL EACH OTHER IS THAT YOU INTERRUPTED US.

SHE WON'T TAKE THE BAIT. SHE *SAID* SHE WAS LEAVING TOWN WITHOUT ME. SHE'S LONG GONE BY NOW.

HAHA...OH. OH, LOOK AT YOU. IT'S SO *ADORABLE* YOU BELIEVE THAT. YOU GOT IN A LITTLE SPAT WITH YOUR SISTER AND NOW YOU'RE DESPERATELY HOPING SHE FOLLOWED THROUGH WITH HER THREAT.

LEFT YOU BEHIND AND SAVED HERSELF.

YOU SEE, I THINK I'LL NET ALL SIX OF YOU. PERHAPS NOT. YOU ARE, AFTER ALL, A DISORGANIZED LOT OF TALENTLESS MISFITS MORE LIKELY TO KILL *EACH OTHER* THAN ANYONE ELSE. BUT REMOVING YOU FROM THE EQUATION IS ENOUGH TO SCARE THE *HELL* OUT OF THEM.

AND, AT THE VERY LEAST, *SHE* WILL COME FOR YOU. I KNOW THIS.

HOW DO YOU... THE *MIRRORS*. IS THAT IT? IS THAT HOW YOU TRACKED US? IS THAT HOW YOU KNOW?

MMM. THE MIRROR IS A USEFUL TOOL. BUT, NO, I KNOW YOUR SISTER WILL COME HERE, COME FIND YOU, ***WASTE*** HERSELF TRYING TO SAVE YOU...BECAUSE I WOULDN'T.

VEX'AHLIA.

ORDERS, MISTRESS?

PREPARE THE RITUAL. CHECK ON THIS ONE EVERY QUARTER HOUR. IF HE TRIES TO ESCAPE... *EVISCERATE HIM.*

YES, MISTRESS.

IF WE GO TO SPIRELING HARROK WITHOUT A SOLUTION, SHE'LL JUST SEND US BACK OUT. WE'LL BE WASTING TIME.

WELL, YOU LOT DO WHAT YOU WANT, I'M GOING TO THE CLASP. TRY AND SAVE STITCH.

I'M WITH YOU.

THEY HAVE VAX, THAT WOMAN. SHE TOOK HIM.

CHATTER

CHATTER

AND WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THEY TOOK HIM?

YEAH. WHAT'S DIS BROTHER WORTH TO YOU? HE YOUR ONLY BROTHER? THAT MIGHT BE AN EXPENSIVE PROBLEM TO FIX.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU GOT YOURSELF INTO A PICKLE, LITTLE LADY.

VERY EXPENSIVE. IF YOU'RE LACKING IN COIN, WE MIGHT KNOW ANOTHER WAY YOU CAN PAY.

NEVER MIND.

HAHA! GOOD LUCK, LADY!

OH, THIS SHOULD BE GOOD.

HEY, I KNOW YOU! YOU SHOT ME WITH AN ARROW!

YOUNG LADY. YOU SEEM DESPERATE.

THEY HAVE MY BROTHER.

GOOD! HE'S AN ASSHOLE!

YOU HAVE THE *BOOK*. YOU KNOW WHERE THEY ARE.

LADY, I DON'T WORK FOR YOU. I DON'T *LIKE* YOU.

BE STILL FOR ONCE, SCANLAN.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

SHE WON'T ANSWER YOU. SHE DOESN'T TRUST YOU. I DON'T THINK SHE TRUSTS *ANYBODY*, WHICH, YOU KNOW...WHY SHOULD SHE?

RIGHT NOW SHE'S REALIZING ANYONE WHO MIGHT VOLUNTEER TO HELP *WANTS* SOMETHING. AND SHE'LL ***OWE*** THEM. AND SHE'S PROBABLY BEEN PLANNING ON SPENDING HER ENTIRE LIFE NEVER OWING ANYONE ***ANYTHING***.

'CEPT MAYBE HER BROTHER, WHO'S *FUCKED*. ONLY REASON SHE'S HERE. HER DESPERATION FINALLY OVERWHELMED HER CYNICISM.

YOUNG LADY, EVEN IF YOU KNEW WHERE YOUR BROTHER WAS... YOU CAN'T HELP HIM ALONE.

THE CHURCH MIGHT HELP. COME WITH US TO THE TEMPLE. WE'LL PRESENT YOUR CASE TO THE PRIOR.

GOD, I LOVE BEING RIGHT! *UNGH* YEAH! SUCK IT!

I FEAR THE YOUNG LADY IS ABOUT TO COMMIT SUICIDE TRYING TO RESCUE A BROTHER WHO'S ALREADY DEAD.

NAH. SHE HAS NO IDEA WHERE HER BROTHER IS OR WHERE TO FIND HIM. BUT I KNOW.

THEN IN A SENSE, SHE IS LUCKY. IT MEANS SHE'LL SURVIVE THIS.

AND SO WILL WE.

BLUUURRP

YEAH, HARD TO ARGUE WITH THAT, I GUESS.

COME. WE RECOVERED THE ARTIFACT. IT'S TIME TO LEAVE THIS ROTTED LOT AND RETURN TO THE TEMPLE. YOU TWO WILL RECEIVE YOUR REWARD WHILE THE CITY BURNS.

NOT A VERY GOOD STORY, THOUGH, IS IT?

KLAK

WEREN'T YOU A SQUIRREL BEFORE?

WOOOSH

THEIR SENSE OF SMELL'S NOT BAD, BUT NOTHING BEATS A DOGGO.

HI!

I DON'T NEED YOU.

THEN WHY DID YOU COME HERE?

I MADE A MISTAKE. GOODBYE.

I WANT TO HELP.

I'M NOT USED TO... HAVING TO RELY ON... ANYONE.

I WANT TO HELP YOU. I THINK...WHAT YOU'RE DOING IS IMPORTANT. THE PEOPLE I'M WITH, THEY'RE... THEY'RE BAD.

SO AM I.

I DON'T THINK SO.

WELL, I'M NOT USED TO ANYONE RELYING ON ME. SO...WE'RE EVEN!

I WENT TO A SCHOOL FOR ***ASSASSINS***. THEY'LL NEVER SEE ME, HEAR ME. I'M TRAINED IN SABOTAGE, INFILTRATION, CAN KILL WITH A KNIFE, SWORD, GARROTE, POISON. BUT I GRADUATED *TOPS* IN ARCHERY.

WOW! NOT ME! I'M TERRIBLE WITH WEAPONS. REALLY KIND OF HATE THEM, ACTUALLY.

THEN WHAT GOOD ARE YOU? JUST SHAPE-CHANGING?

OH, NO! I MEAN, THAT'S... THAT'S PRETTY USEFUL. BUT I ALSO COMMAND THE ELEMENTS.

REALLY?

WELL, ONLY A LITTLE RIGHT NOW. BUT, YEAH.

OKAY, WELL... THAT SEEMS USEFUL. TRY AND KEEP UP.

WAIT 'TIL I FIGURE OUT WINGS! THEN YOU'LL BE THE ONE KEEP-ING UP!

HEY! WHERE ARE WE GOING?

I HAVE TO RETRIEVE SOME-THING MY BROTHER CONVINCED ME TO LEAVE OUTSIDE OF TOWN. A TRINKET.

CLINK

SSSS

SSSS

TCH TCH

TCH

TCH

SCHWOP

TCHK

CREAK

SCH

KA

SCH

FWIP

WOOSH

?

SO WHO WERE THOSE PEOPLE YOU WERE WITH?

DON'T ASK. TIBERIUS IS THE ONLY ONE I TRUST.

YOU'RE A BETTER JUDGE OF CHARACTER THAN I THOUGHT.

HEY, THANKS!

WHY DID YOU AGREE TO HELP ME?

OH, AH...BECAUSE I GUESS...YOU SEEMED LIKE...I DUNNO, I JUST SAW YOU AND THOUGHT, "WOW." YOU SEEM LIKE SOMEONE WHO HAS IT ALL FIGURED OUT AND... AND I WISH I HAD IT FIGURED OUT.

WAIT A MINUTE, ARE YOU SAYING YOU CAME ALONG BECAUSE YOU... YOU *LOOK UP* TO ME?

I WOULDN'T GO *THAT* FAR.

I GUESS I JUST MEAN... YOU DIDN'T SEEM AFRAID. OF ANYTHING.

I USED TO BE. I USED TO BE AFRAID OF THE FUTURE, OF MY FATHER. OF SCHOOL.

WOW, REALLY? YOU?

SURE.

BUT THAT... YOU'RE NOT AFRAID ANYMORE.

NO. I REFUSE TO LIVE MY LIFE IN *FEAR*.

WHAT CHANGED?

IT'S OKAY. I'M JUST TRYING TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE. THIS WORLD. SOMETIMES I ASK DUMB... I MEAN, WE BARELY KNOW EACH OTHER.

I SHOULD JUST SHUT UP.

YOU'RE *RISKING YOUR LIFE* TO HELP ME.

WHAT? OH, SURE. I MEAN... AND ***VEX***.

I'M VEX.

I MEAN... AND ***VAX***.

I REMEMBER WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED.

OKAY.

IT WAS AT SCHOOL. ***THE*** SCHOOL. SECRET ASSASSIN SCHOOL FOR THE CHILDREN OF ELF NOBLES. I MEAN, IT WASN'T EASY FOR ANYONE, BUT VAX AND I WERE ***SUPPOSED*** TO FAIL.

FAIL? WHY?

TO PROVE OUR FATHER RIGHT. WE WERE HAPPY LIVING WITH OUR MOTHER. BUT SHE WAS A HUMAN. FATHER WAS... NO CHILD OF HIS, EVEN A HALF-BREED *OTHLIR*, WAS GOING TO BE RAISED LIKE A PEASANT.

IT SOUNDS LIKE HE WAS PROUD OF YOU.

HAH! THE OPPOSITE. OR... I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU CALL IT. HE WASN'T ASHAMED OF US. HE JUST WANTED TO ***SAVE FACE***.

LAUGHED?

HE PLACED A WAGER WITH HIS HIGH-BORN FRIENDS ON HOW LONG WE'D LAST. HE LAUGHED AT THE IDEA THAT WE COULD ENDURE THE SCHOOL. HE'D BET ***AGAINST*** US.

HE TOOK US AWAY FROM OUR MOTHER BECAUSE WE'RE ELVES. THEN HE PUT US IN AN ELF SCHOOL BECAUSE WE WERE NOBLE-BORN. AND OF COURSE EVERYONE THERE TREATED US LIKE WE WERE COCK-ROACHES. AFTER MONTHS OF TRYING TO BE STRONG, LIKE WE ASSUMED FATHER WANTED, WE COMPLAINED TO HIM AND HE LAUGHED.

THAT'S AWFUL.

I DON'T THINK... WE KNEW HE COULD BE CRUEL, WE KNEW HE WAS CALLOUS AND NEGLECTFUL, BUT THAT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN WE REALIZED ***HE WAS NOT ON OUR SIDE***. EVER SINCE THEN, IT'S BEEN ME AND VAX AGAINST THE WORLD. SO FAR... THE WORLD'S WINNING.

AT LEAST YOU ***HAVE*** VAX. HE SEEMS NICE.

TRUST ME WHEN I SAY THIS, HE IS NOT THE NICE ONE.

YOU DON'T LIKE IT? GO HOME. SEE HOW LONG IT TAKES TO GET PROMOTED BACK IN WILDEMOUNT.

I VOLUNTEERED FOR THIS TRIP TO ADVANCE. NOT TO GET KILLED IN THE PROCESS.

WELL YOU PICKED THE WRONG FUCKING CAREER, MAN.

BASH

AAARRGH!

SCHNK!

CRUNCH

WHOOSH

FWHOOH

FWOOH!

ACK!

SCHLIK

UNGH!

SLAM

GNHH!

TWIST

PANTING

WHAP

SSHH

NNGH!

HUFF

HUFF

SCHLIP

THUNK

CLINK!

STAGGER

CREAK

GOOD TEAM.

AND YOU DIDN'T GET EATEN! 'CAUSE YOU LISTENED, UNLIKE *SOME* BROTHERS I KNOW.

FWOOSH!

YEAH!

COME ON, VAX IS STILL IN DANGER.

YOU AND YOUR BROTHER AREN'T REALLY MUCH ALIKE, ARE YOU?

NOT IN THE WAY YOU MEAN, NO. BUT WE BOTH SEE THE WORLD THE SAME WAY.

YOU DO? DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT.

OH, SURE. WE BOTH THINK EVERYTHING'S TERRIBLE. PEOPLE ARE MOSTLY CRUEL, VENAL COWARDS. ONLY DIFFERENCE IS, THAT BOTHERS HIM. NOT ME.

WOW. THAT'S... WHEN YOU SAY 'PEOPLE'...

EVERYONE. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT FROM ***EVERYONE*** AND YOU'LL SEE HOW QUICK EVERY-ONE IS TO HATE.

HATE YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE DIFFERENT. TREAT YOU LIKE AN ANIMAL. NO, WORSE. LIKE AN OBJECT. LIKE A ***THING***.

THAT'S TERRIBLE. IS THAT WHAT YOUR LIFE WAS LIKE?

NOT JUST MY LIFE, ANTLER-HEAD.

ANYWAY, WHY ASK ME? WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO BE AFRAID OF?

ME? OH I'M AFRAID OF EVERYTHING.

NO YOU'RE NOT. I SAW YOU TRANSFORM INTO A LION AND LEAP INTO BATTLE AGAINST A TWO-TON CROCODILE. THAT WASN'T FEAR. THAT WAS STEEL. STEEL IN THE BONE.

THAT WAS A TIGER, ACTUALLY. IT'S A LOT EASIER TO BE BRAVE WHEN YOU'RE A TIGER. OR A BEAR.

I LIKE BEARS.

WHAT ARE YOU *REALLY* AFRAID OF?

OH, FAILING I SUPPOSE. LETTING MY FAMILY DOWN.

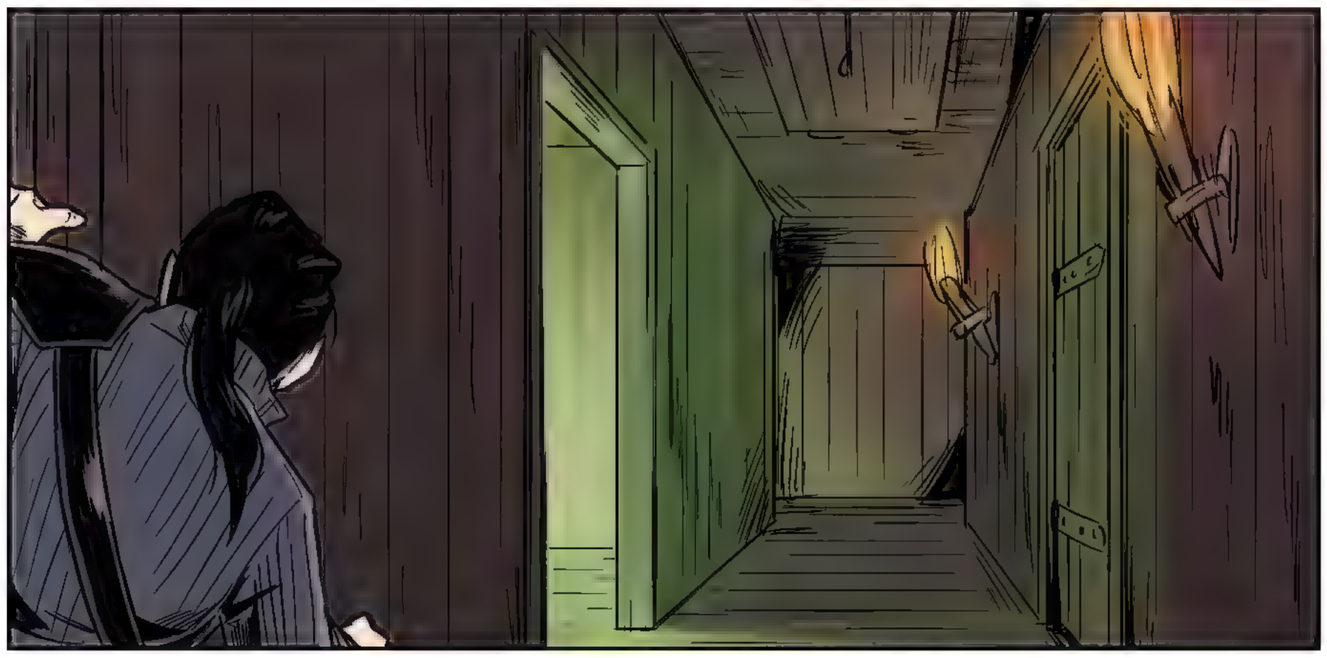
BEING LIKE MY MOTHER.

YOUR MOTHER? WAS SHE LIKE... AN EVIL WITCH OR SOMETHING? THAT WOULD BE COOL.

NO, SHE WAS A DRUID, LIKE ME. EXACTLY LIKE ME, ACTUALLY. AND SHE... SHE FAILED. SHE HAD TO DO SOMETHING IMPORTANT, AND SHE FAILED.

NOW IT'S UP TO ME.

I JUST DON'T WANT TO BE AFRAID ANYMORE.



Ssss...

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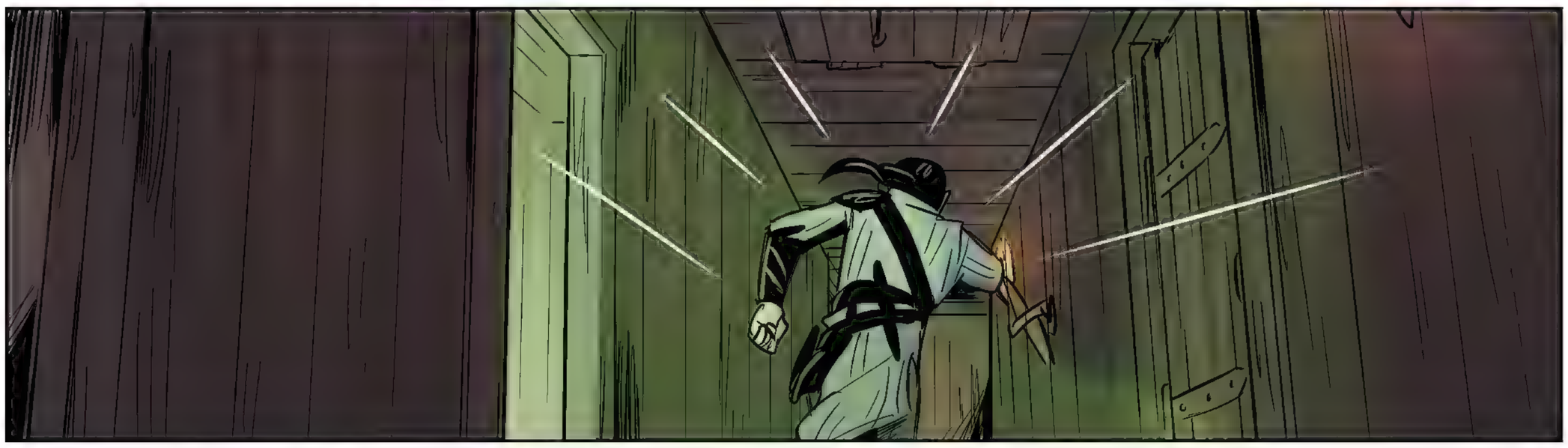
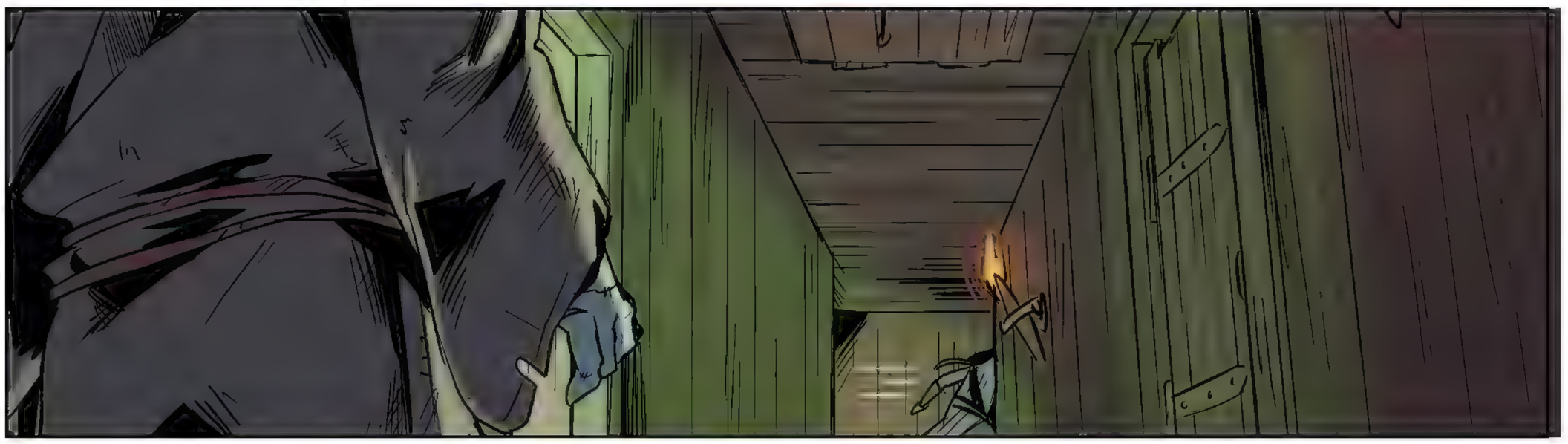
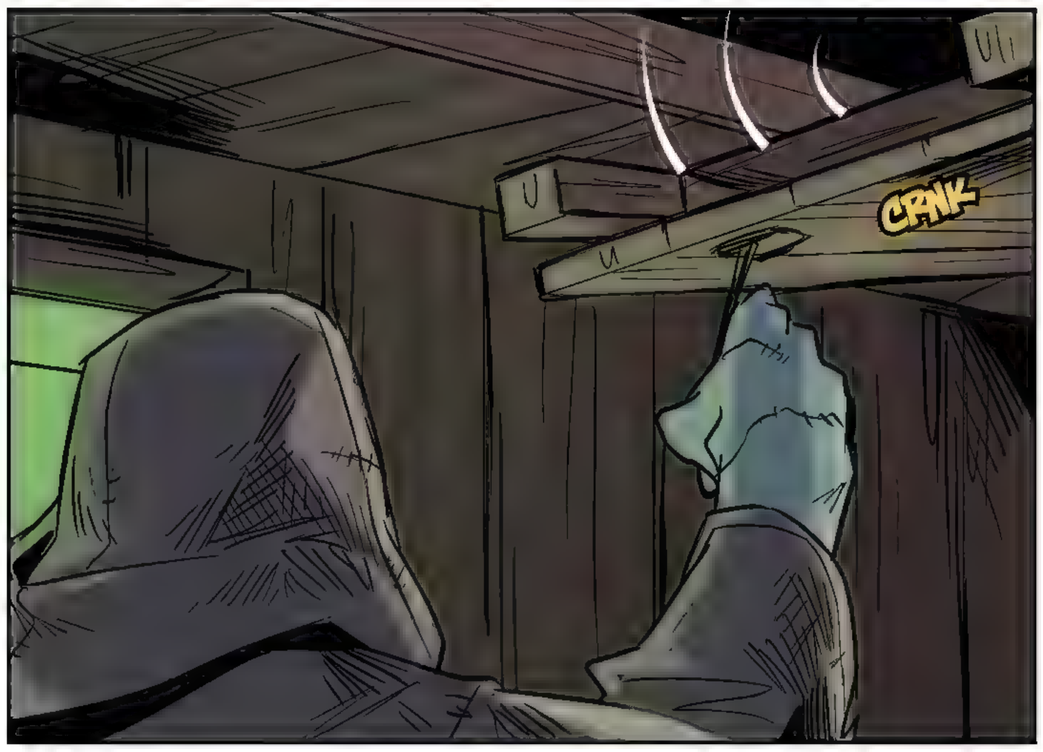
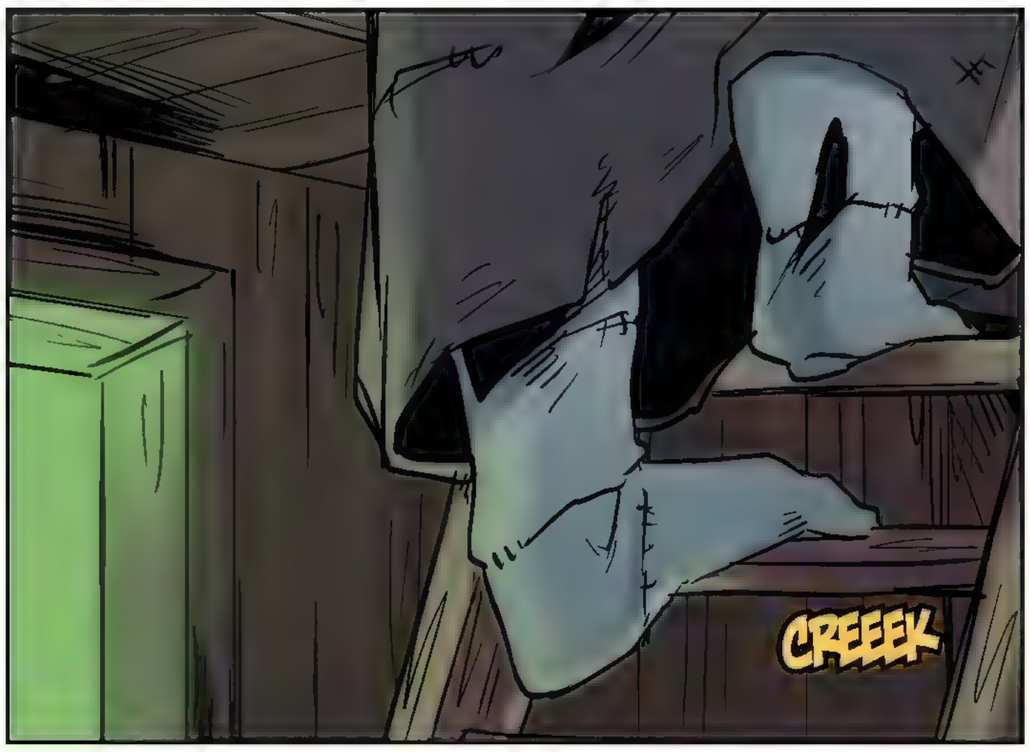





CRAK


CREEEK

ANYWAY, STAY HERE.

OKAY!

WHO IS MY FAVORITE BEAR?! YOU ARE!

BLECH! BEAR SLOBBER! *AUGH!*

ALL RIGHT, I FEEL BETTER ABOUT OUR CHANCES NOW.

YOU HAVE A BEAR?!

WE SORT OF HAVE EACH OTHER.

VAX THOUGHT IT WOULD BE TOUGH BRINGING A BEAR INTO TOWN. HE WAS PROBABLY RIGHT BUT... WE NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET.

RRUUU

OKAY, TRINKET LIKES YOU. WE CAN BE FRIENDS.

~~VAX VOX VAX~~ VEX + KEYLETH 8FF!
WOW.
WE HAVE TO GET BACK AND FIND VAX.
I THINK I CAN FIND THEM. THAT WOMAN IN GREEN. SHE SMELLED... ***VERY STRANGE***. IT SHOULDN'T BE HARD TO FIND HER SCENT. WE JUST HAVE TO GET LUCKY.
FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING.

WHAM!

THUP

THUNK

CLICK

THP
THP
THP

YOU'RE MORE THAN I EXPECTED.

BUT ONLY A LITTLE MORE.

CRACK

SMASH

STOP HIM!

YES, MISTRESS.

I WASN'T 'WANDERING THE SWAMP,' I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU! I'M CERTAIN I WAS JUST GETTING THE HANG OF TRACKING.

UH-HUH.

WOW, THE SMELL IS STRONG HERE.

YEAH, A LOT OF SMELLS ARE, I BET.

I'M GUESSING OUR QUARRY IS ON A SHIP?

YOU GUESS CORRECTLY!

YAY!

OH, GOOD. THE GNOME AND THE HALF-GIANT. DID YOU BRING THE BOOK?

FORGET THE BOOK. IT'S A MACGUFFIN, AND IN CODE.

I OVERHEARD THEM TALKING ABOUT WHICH SHIP THEY USE TO BRING THE POISON IN.

AND HOW MUCH IS THIS GOING TO COST US?

YOU WOUND ME, LADY!

IMPLYING I WOULD ***SELL*** YOU SUCH IMPORTANT, SUCH ***PERSONALLY*** IMPORTANT INFORMATION!

DAT'S WHAT YOU SAID YOU WERE GONNA DO.

WELL YES, BUT NOW IF I DID IT, IT WOULD MAKE HER ***RIGHT.***

SO PROVE ME WRONG. WHICH SHIP IS MY BROTHER ON?

THAT ONE.

BOOM!

VAX!

?

HUH. I WAS RIGHT.

I KNOW THEY HAVE AN OPERATION SOMEWHERE IN THE CITY. BUT THAT SHIP MUST BE THEIR FLOATING HQ.

GASP

SPLOOSH!

PANTING

I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY FOR WHAT I...I DIDN'T MEAN IT.

YOU'RE THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERS TO ME. I CAN'T LOSE... I CAN'T LOSE YOU TOO.

LET'S GO. FAR FROM THIS PLACE. THEY WANT TO POISON THIS CITY, THEY'RE WELCOME TO IT.

NO. NO, THE DRUID AND...SORCERER WERE...WRONG. IT *IS* A CURSE.

WHAT..?

THE POISON'S JUST A COMPONENT. IT'S GOING TO KILL EVERYONE WHO EVER DRANK...EVER TOUCHED THAT WATER.

AND I'M GOING TO ***STOP*** THEM.

WHAT?!

ALONE IF I HAVE TO.

NO. NOT ALONE. NEVER ALONE. WE GO TOGETHER. **ALWAYS.**

WE GO TOGETHER.

YOU?

US. US, THE SIX OF US. I MEAN OTHERWISE... WHAT WAS THE POINT? OF ANYTHING? TIBERIUS, SAY SOMETHING.

WELL OF COURSE, I AGREE! WE MUST BAND TOGETHER AND STOP THAT WOMAN. SHE'S A HUGE BUTTHEAD.

WHAT ABOUT THE HALF-GIANT?
NOT REALLY.
YES, YOU DO.
GROG, YOU WANT TO TAKE ON A WHOLE THIEVES' GUILD? JUST THE SIX OF US?
I GUESS I DO.
THEM I GET. BUT YOU?
HEY, I'M A BARD. I KNOW HOW THIS SCENE ENDS. YOU THINK I'M GOING TO DERAIL THE NARRATIVE? NO WAY.
THIS ISN'T A STORY, ***GNOME***. YOU DON'T KNOW HOW THIS ENDS. WE COULD ALL DIE.
FIRST OF ALL, YES, IT ***IS*** A STORY. EVERYTHING'S A STORY. DON'T ***EVER*** SAY THAT AGAIN.
SECONDLY, I KNOW ***EXACTLY*** HOW IT ENDS. THEY'RE TRYING TO KILL AN ENTIRE CITY. WE'RE GONNA STOP 'EM. WE'RE GONNA GET ON THAT BOAT...
...AND WE'RE GONNA ***BURN*** THE ***FUCKING*** THING TO THE GROUND.

WE NEED A WAY ON THAT BOAT.

THERE'S A RAMP RIGHT HERE.

GROG, THEY HAVE GUARDS POSTED.

UM, YEAH BUT ONLY... TWOOO?

I CAN CONTROL THE FIRES IN THEIR LANTERNS, SNUFF THEM OUT. BOARD IN THE DARK?

BOARD UNDER COVER OF NIGHT! THEY'D NEVER SEE US. THAT'S A WONDERFUL IDEA!

THOSE TWO WILL ALERT EVERYONE ON THAT BOAT, FORCING US TO KILL THEM ALL.

OH, THANK YOU, LADY!

WHAT'S THE LIMIT OF THAT SPELL?

AH. YES. ACTUALLY, NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT...I CAN ONLY MAKE FIRE. NOT...NOT PUT IT OUT. SORRY.

ALL RIGHT, WELL, THAT WAS... IT WAS STILL A GOOD IDEA. IN PRINCIPLE.

MAYBE WE CAN GET IN THE WAY VAX GOT OUT?

AH, I GOT OUT BY TRICKING OUR ENEMY INTO ZAPPING A GOLEM WITH LIGHTNING AND THEN DODGING HIS LIGHTNING FIST SO HE'D SMASH A HOLE IN THE HULL OF THE BOAT, THEN JUMPING THROUGH THE HOLE.

UM. MY WORD!

OKAY, SO WE JUST NEED TO DO THAT BACKWARD. EASY.

GROG!

SWIIISH!

BOOM!

THWIP!

CRUNK

TYPICAL.

KLAAANG!

THWACK

YOUR HALF-GIANT HAS MET HIS MATCH, I'M AFRAID!

HE MIGHT HAVE, BUT *WE* HAVEN'T.

GROG!

YOU'RE THE STRONGEST IN THIS FIGHT, YOU'RE MY ...INSPIRAAAATION!

SLASH!

SPLOOSH!

SHIT, GROG, COULD YOU STAY IN A FIGHT LONGER THAN THIRTY SECONDS, PLEASE?

HOW DEEP IS THAT WATER? THERE COULD BE ANYTHING DOWN THERE. SHARKS!

WELL, THEY'LL PROBABLY BE OKAY AS LONG AS THEY DON'T ANNOY HIM. COME ON. IF WE WAIT FOR GROG WE'LL BE TOO LATE.

IT'S BROKEN. IT'S BROKEN. WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. FUCK.

OH! AH, YEAH! GREAT! WOW!

SHE'S JUST NOT USED TO...

YES WE KNOW, ALREADY ESTABLISHED THAT, MINUS FIVE POINTS FOR REPETITION. COME ON.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE WE'RE GOING?

SORT OF...

THIS IS IT.

WHAT ARE THOSE THINGS?

SPIRITS. I DON'T KNOW. SOULS. THE SOULS OF EVERYONE WHO'S BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE POISON THEY'VE BEEN POURING INTO THE SWAMP.

THIS EXPLAINS MUCH. THE *AQUA CAEDES* IS RUMORED TO KILL WHOLE POPULATIONS BECAUSE IT IS NATURALLY RESONANT WITH ARCANISM. THIS IS DEEP LORE...

WE COULD DILUTE IT.

WITH WHAT?

WE HAVE OUR WATERSKINS.

WATER WOULDN'T DO IT, IT NEEDS TO BE... YOU HAVE TO TRICK THE POISON.

TRICK?

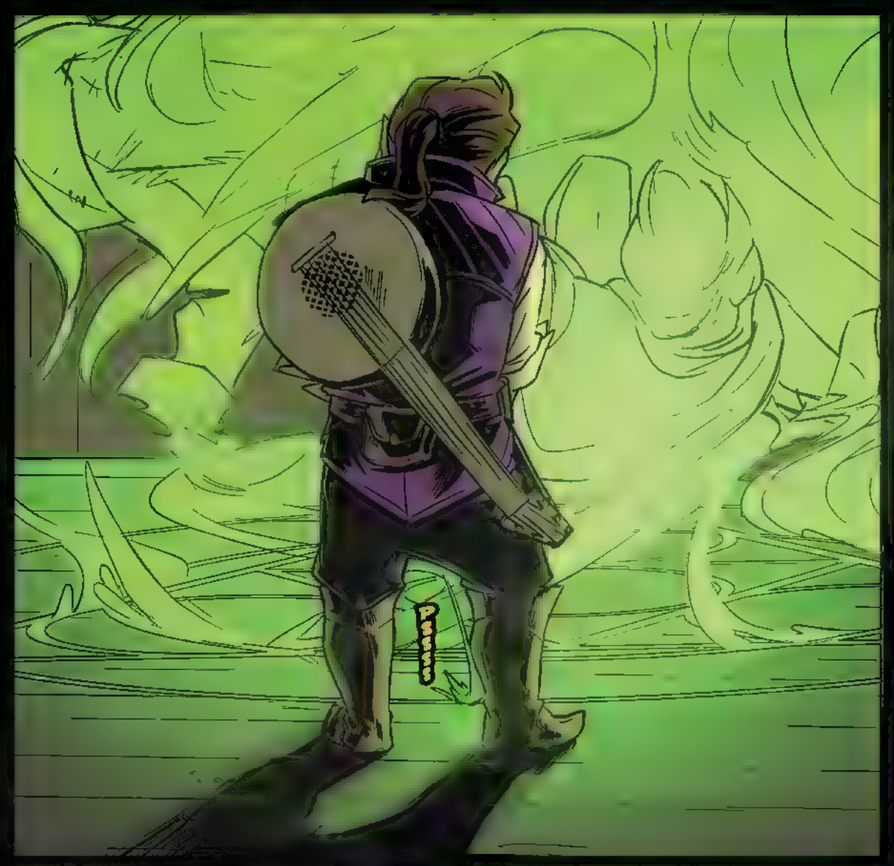
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAY IT IN WIZARD-SPEAK! THE POISON IS SO STRONG IT IGNORES ANYTHING VERY DIFFERENT FROM ITSELF! BUT YOU CAN FOOL IT!

AH! A WEAK ACID! LIKE...WINE OR FRUIT JUICE.

MM. MAYBE. OR SOMETHING EVEN...

TINKLE

SPLASH


Pssssss

YOU GUYS WANT TO GET IN ON THIS? WE'RE ON THE CLOCK.

I WANT YOU TO REMEMBER IT WAS *YOUR* IDEA TO RELY ON THESE IDIOTS.

SPLISH
SPLASH

IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED, IT'S WORKING.

WELL, I CAN'T ARGUE WITH SUCCESS.
I THINK WE'RE GOING TO NEED MORE PEE PEE! DRAGON MAN? HEY FOXY HALF-ELF, IS THAT A BOY-BEAR?

MISTRESS WILL BE DISPLEASED.

HE LITERALLY CAUGHT US WITH OUR PANTS DOWN.

A CONSTRUCT! WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?!

I DON'T THINK IT'S THE MOST WELL-BUILT GOLEM IN THE WORLD. I OUTSMARTED IT BEF...

VAX!

KRACK!

THIS IS WHAT WE GET FOR NOT RESTING.

THIS ISN'T WORKING!

THUP!

WUDD!

RUNNING OUT OF SPELLS! AND... BLOOD AND ORGANS!

FLEE, THEN.

THERE ARE LIMITS TO THE POWER OF MAGIC! YOU NEED TO LEARN WHEN TO GIVE UP, DRAGON MAN!

MY POWER COMES FROM WITHIN. NO GODS, NO RESEARCH, NEITHER NATURE NOR SONG. AS LONG AS THERE IS WILL...

...THERE IS POWER!

BURNING HANDS!

FWOSHHHH

IIEEE!

I COULD GET USED TO THIS, HAVING HEALERS AROUND.

URK

SHRUK!

TOLD YOU. ALL THE LITTLE INSECTS CAUGHT IN MY WEB. SO PREDICTABLE.

WE'LL SURPRISE YOU YET.

NOTHING FOR IT, I SUPPOSE. IF WE'RE GOING TO GO OUT, MIGHT AS WELL DO IT IN A BLAZE OF...

FIIIRE!

FWOOOH!

RRAAGGH! MASTER!

WHAM

YOU STUPID BRUTE!

THE GOLEM'S ON OUR SIDE!

IT'S GONE MAD. IT DOESN'T KNOW WHOSE SIDE IT'S ON.

IT SHOULD JOIN THE TEAM, IT'LL FIT RIGHT IN!

CRACK!

ZWOOOOSH

GASP

WHAT... WHAT IS THAT?

I...I DO NOT KNOW.

IT'S GOT SIX ARMS! IT'S A DEMON! DON'T ASK WHAT TYPE, HOW WOULD I KNOW?!

SLASH

SLICE

WELL, THAT'S ONE PROBLEM TAKEN CARE OF.

RAWR!

THUD

THUD

THUD

SLAM

A DEMON-ILLUSIONIST? COME ON!

OUT OF ARROWS.

REGRETS?

NAH. IT WAS WORTH A TRY.

FOR A MOMENT I THOUGHT...MAYBE WITH A GROUP WE COULD...BUT AGAINST THIS?

SHWRIP!

THERE'S NOTHING WE COULD HAVE DONE.

SHLIK!

NO ONE CAN SAVE US NOW.

CRASH!

CLANG!

SPLIK

RRAAAAAAA!

TWACK!

NO! WAIT!

FWOOOOM!!!

THOK

TCHK

TCHK

SSSS.

AND WE *PEED* IN IT TOO! HAH! TAKE THAT, BITCH! *WOOOOOOO!*

GROG, YOU SAVED US.

WHAT? OH. HELLO TIGER-LADY! THAT WAS FUN. IS EVERYBODY ALIVE?

YEP! WELCOME BACK, BIG GUY, GREAT ENTRANCE. HEY, IS THERE ANY *LOOT* IN THIS PLACE?

OH, UM. YEAH. BUT I FINK IT'S PROBABLY MELTED BY NOW?

M-MELTED?

UM, YEAH I SORT OF KNOCKED OVER A LOT OF LANTERNS ON THE WAY HERE? AND NOW I THINK THE WHOLE PLACE IS ON FIRE.

GREAT. WE NEVER GET TO ENJOY ANYTHING.

WE HAVE TO FIND A WAY OUT!

OKAY, WELL...

"NNGH"

YOU WANT TO LEAVE? NOW'S THE TIME. WE CAN SLIP AWAY...

ACTUALLY...THIS IS CRAZY, BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT I THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT? WHEN YOU WERE... DILUTING THE POISON?

THIS IS WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN LIKE AT THE SCHOOL. IF WE'D BEEN...YOU KNOW. ANYONE ELSE.

NORMAL KIDS.

FUCK NORMAL.

SHOULD WE LEAVE TOWN?

I DUNNO, I LIKE IT HERE! LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR A BAND OF PLUCKY ADVENTURERS. GOOD OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT.

I THINK WE SHOULD FIND A VERY EXPENSIVE TAVERN...

...AND GET COMPLETELY ***SHITFACED***.

YOU?!

WHAT, DID YOU THINK I WAS THE SERIOUS ONE?

I'M AFRAID YOU HAVE BEEN SO FAR.

YEAH!

WE GOT A ***LOT*** TO LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER!

LET'S GET STARTED.

BUT YOU HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT.

NAH, WE WERE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF TOWN. BUT WHATEVER WAS HAPPENING IS OVER. YOU STILL GOT STITCH?

OH YES. AND DON'T WORRY, I'LL ADMINISTER THE ANTIDOTE. A DEAL'S A DEAL.

YOU'RE A WOMAN OF YOUR WORD. STITCH MAKES IT THROUGH THIS, MIGHT NOT MIND ANOTHER JOB.

INTERESTING YOU MENTION THAT. TELL ME AGAIN WHO INTERFERED WITH YOUR OPERATION?

HALF-ELF GIRL.

YEAH. COMES UP TO OUR TABLE, GABBLES AT US, AND WE'RE DOWN TWO PAIRS OF BOOTS. OUR DRUID AND SORCERER JUST FUCKED OFF.

HMM. I'VE FOUND IT'S BAD POLICY TO LET FREELANCERS INTER-FERE WITH OUR OPERATION. EVEN IF THAT OPERATION SUCCEEDS.

I THINK I TAKE YOUR MEANING...

ISELDA? WE'RE OUT OF *AQUA CAEDES*.

IT'S BEEN THREE DAYS, I DIDN'T KNOW IF YOU WANTED ME TO WAIT...

LUSTRAN ZETH.

AHH!

YOU NO LONGER HAVE TO BE A PAWN, ZETH.

THE MIRRORS! THIS...YOU'RE THE SOURCE OF....

YES. THIS IS THE MIRROR OF TRANSLATION. I WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO USE IT.

I...WHAT HAPPENED TO ISELDA?

WE HAVE A POSITION AVAILABLE. AND MYRIAD REWARDS AWAIT YOU...

THE END...

STILBEN

IT'S LOOKING *PRETTY* ROUGH.

GONNA LOOK A *LOT* ROUGHER WHEN WE'RE DONE WITH IT.

FOR STILBEN.

AND THE *VERY SMALL* AMOUNT OF MONEY THEY'RE PAYING US TO KILL THIS HORRID THING.

I'VE TAKEN *SHITS* THAT WERE SCARIER THAN YOU!

UURGH?

UURGH!

RAAAAAGGGGH!

KEYLETH, WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING IN THE OOZE, SEE IF THAT THING HAD ANY VALUABLES ON IT.

UUUUURGH...

"MORE ALE!"

HOW MANY ALES, SIR?

MORE!

THIS REALLY IS THE LIFE, ISN'T IT?

KILLING CREATURES FOR COIN! LEARNING YOUR BOSS IS EVIL! EXTORTING HIM FOR MORE COIN! SPENDING IT ON DELICIOUS BOOZE!

AND OCCASIONALLY, DELICIOUS COMPANY...

I SURE COULD GO FOR--

--OW.

COMPANY? WE AREN'T ENOUGH?

I'M NOT EXPLAINING THIS TO HER.

YOUR ALE, SIR.

GROG?

GROG. ALE. LOTS OF ALE.

RIIIIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.

GROG.

GROG.

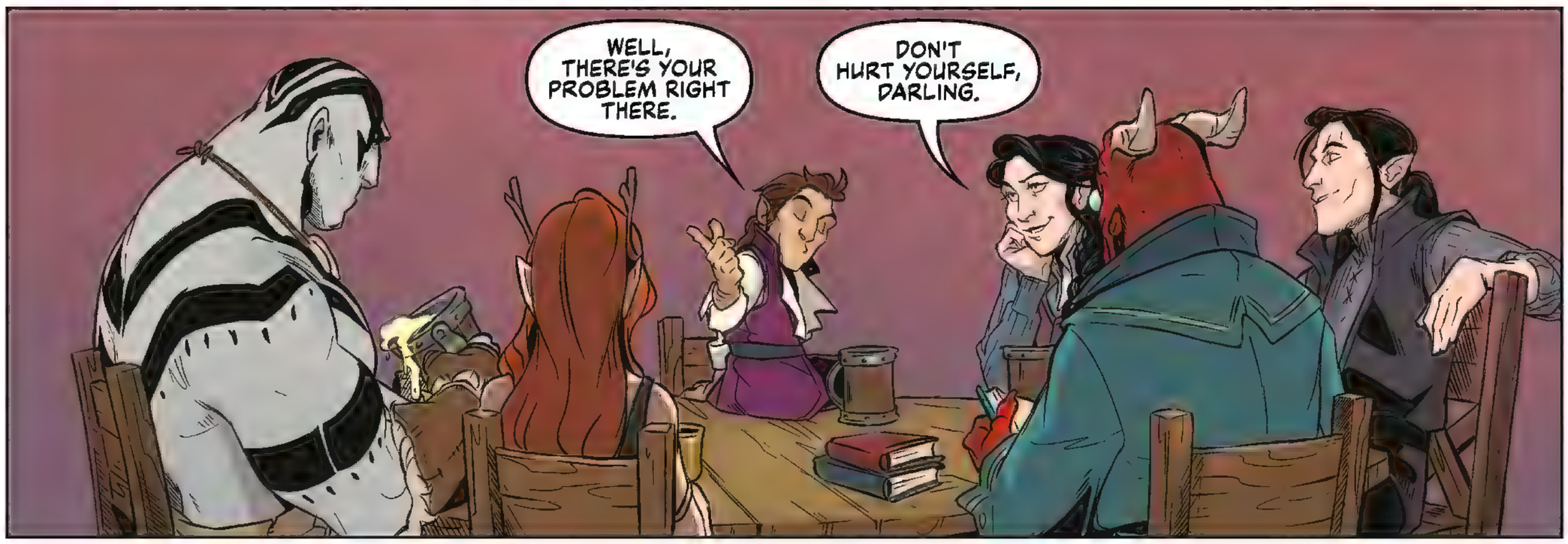
I'M GOING TO DRINK YOUR ALE NOW, GROG.

GROG!

SCANLAN? IS SOMETHING WRONG?
GROG IS...
I THINK HE'S DEAD.

ARE YOU TOUCHIN' MY DRINK?

GROG! WHAT HAPPENED?!
...NOTHIN'?
I WAS JUST THINKIN'.
ABOUT STUFF.


WELL, THERE'S YOUR PROBLEM RIGHT THERE.
DON'T HURT YOURSELF, DARLING.

FWOOOOOOOOOOSSSH

SSSSHHHHHHHHFFFFFF

GROG

GRRRRRRRG

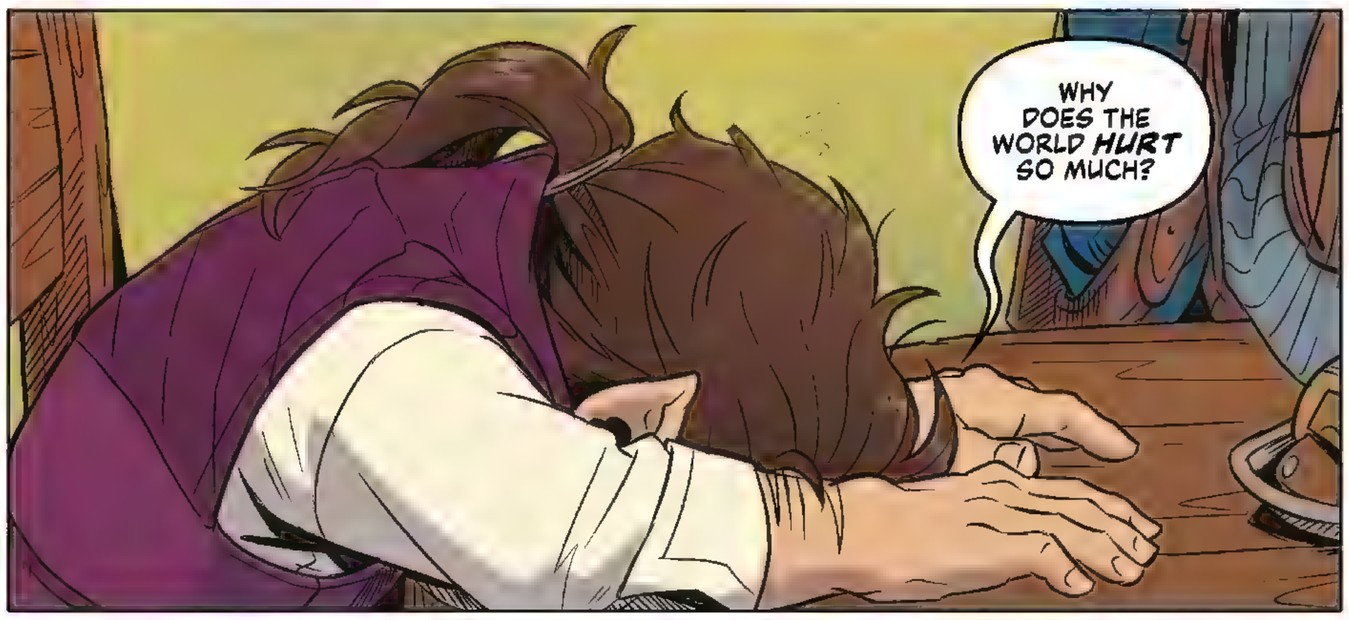
FATHER?

ALL *THREE* OF YOU?

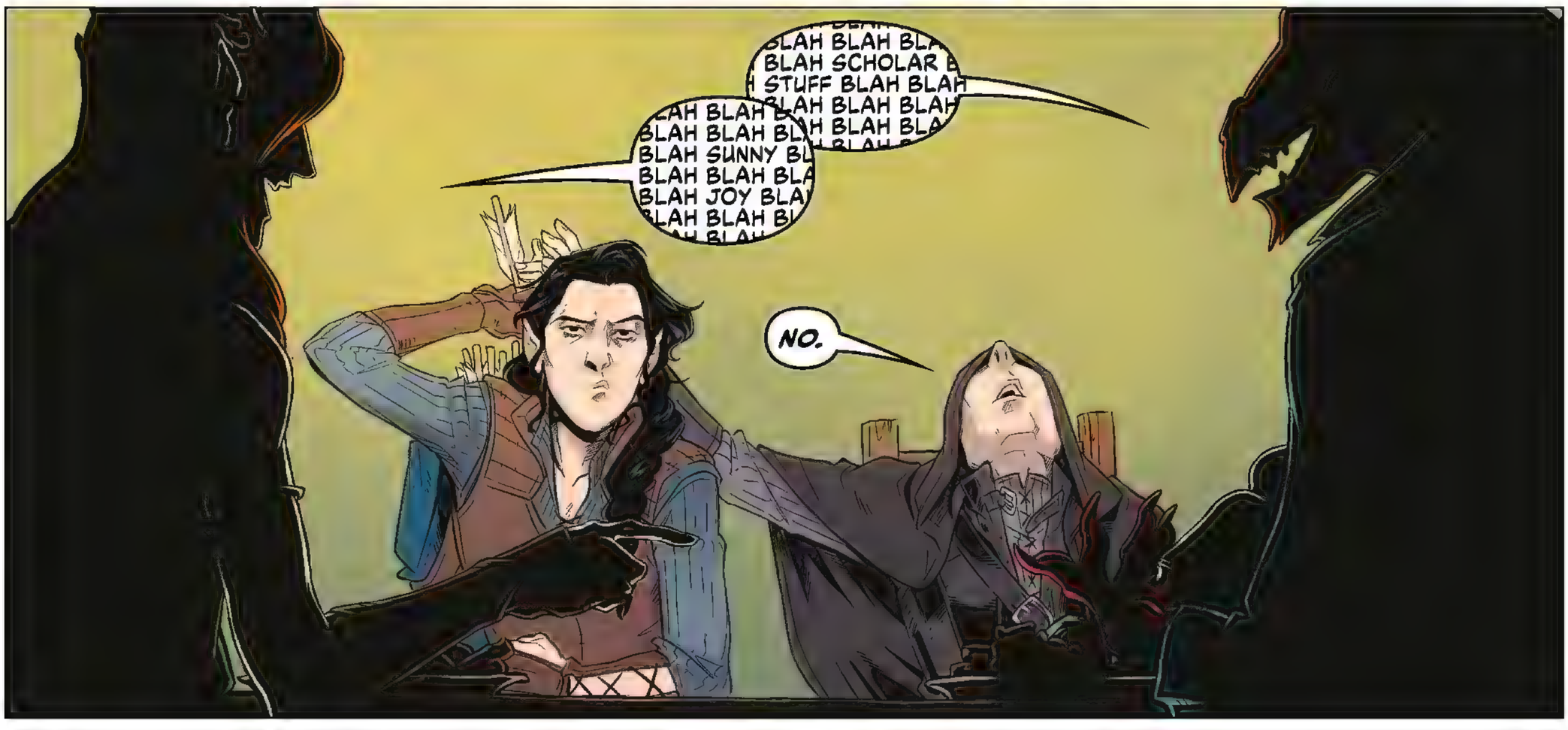
IF YOU INSIST...

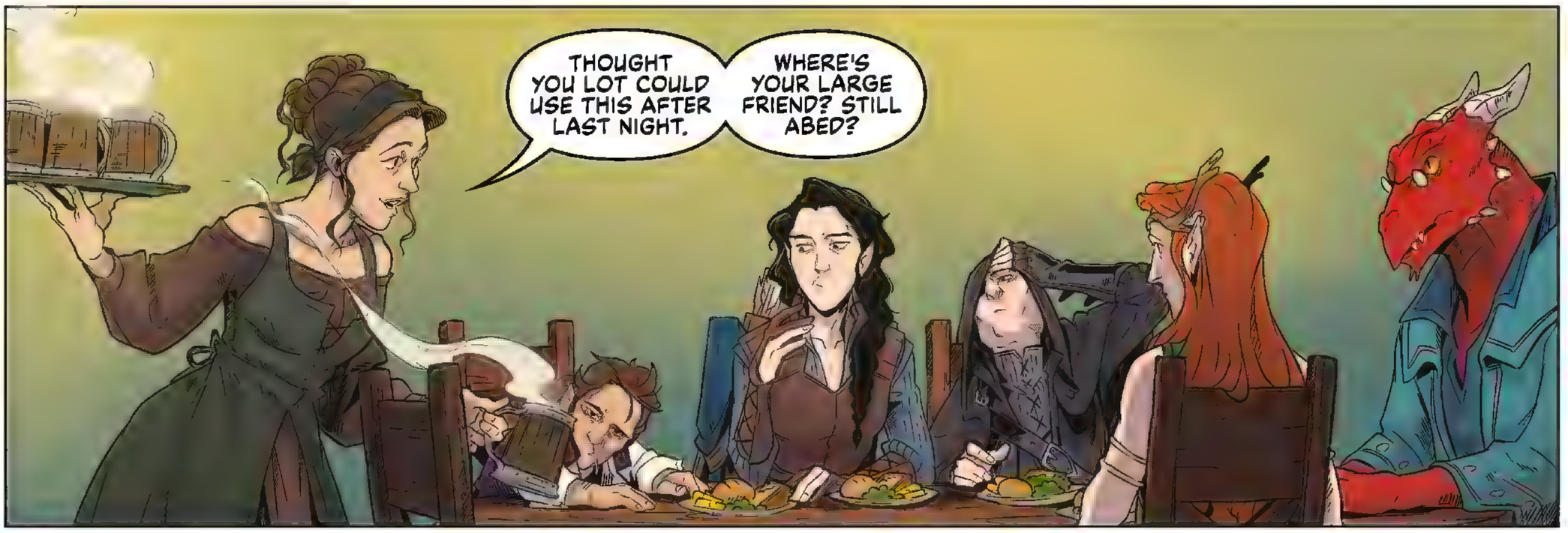
ISN'T IT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING?

ONE ARROW.
JUST ONE.
NO.


WHY DOES THE WORLD HURT SO MUCH?

YOU'VE HARDLY LOOKED UP FROM YOUR BOOK, TIBERIUS. DID YOU FIND SOMETHING INTERESTING?
OH YES!
I THINK WE'RE ACTUALLY FAR CLOSER THAN I REALIZED TO ONE OF THE HISTORICAL SITES MENTIONED IN...


BLAH BLAH BLAH SCHOLAR BLAH STUFF BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH SUNNY BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH JOY BLAH BLAH BLAH
NO.


THOUGHT YOU LOT COULD USE THIS AFTER LAST NIGHT.
WHERE'S YOUR LARGE FRIEND? STILL ABED?

I WAS WONDERING WHY WE SEEMED TO HAVE SO MUCH EXTRA MEAT WITH BREAKFAST...
SCANLAN, DID YOU SEE HIM THIS MORNING?

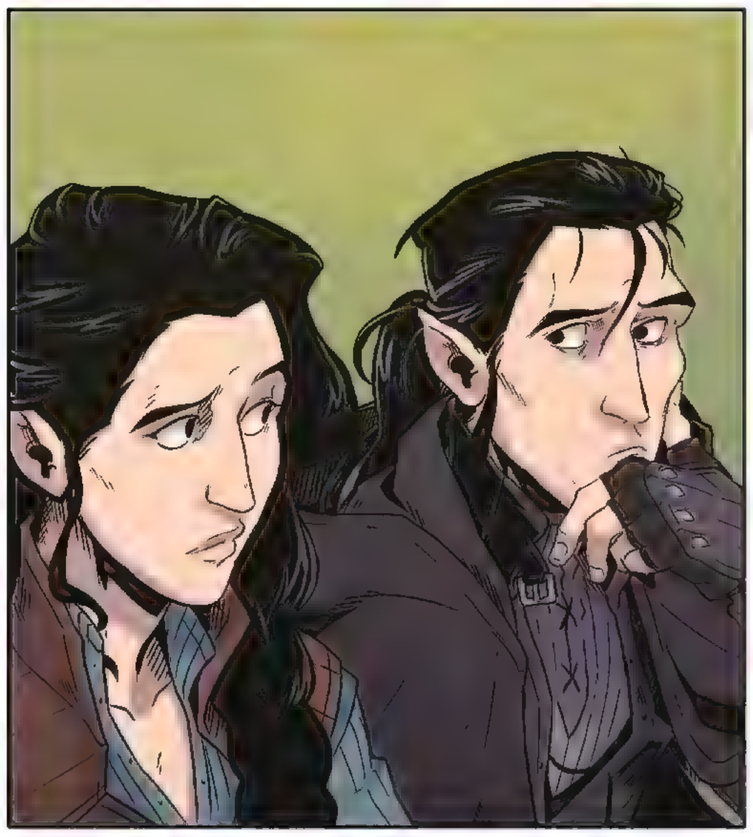
YOU KNOW... I DON'T THINK I DID.
HOW IN THE WORLD COULD YOU MISS HIM LEAVING?

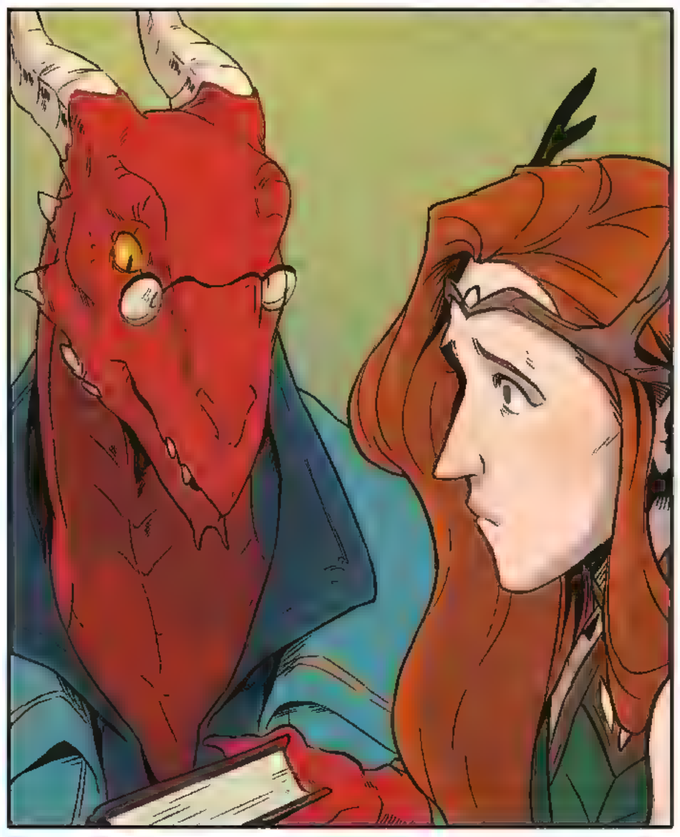
HEY, DO YOU THINK THIS JUST HAPPENS ON ITS OWN?
I TAKE MY BEAUTY SLEEP VERY SERIOUSLY.

ALSO, I HAD A LOT TO DRINK LAST NIGHT.

HE WAS ACTING PRETTY DAMN ODD LAST NIGHT.
WHAT WITH THE THINKING AND ALL.

I DON'T THINK HE EVEN FINISHED HIS ALE.





WE SHOULD GO ASK AROUND TOWN.
MAYBE SOMEONE SAW HIM?
HE'S A *GOLIATH.* HE CAN'T BE *THAT* HARD TO FIND.

GREETINGS AND SALUTATIONS. MY NAME IS TIBERIUS STORMWIND--IS THAT AN OSIUN CODEX YOU'RE CARRYING?

APOLOGIES, FIRST THINGS FIRST. I'M SEARCHING FOR...

...MY VERY BEST FRIEND. AND THE SECOND-MOST HEROIC MAN YOU'LL EVER MEET.

A VERY CLOSE RUNNER-UP TO MYSELF, OF COURSE. HE'S...

...MISSING. NOT THAT I'M ACCUSING YOU OF ANYTHING!

I'M SURE YOU'RE **VERY** NICE AND ***DON'T*** KIDNAP OR KILL STRANGERS!

...I'LL GO AWAY NOW.

UNLESS YOU'D LIKE ME TO BUY SOMETHING?

HEY. HAVE YOU SEEN A GOLIATH?

PROBABLY CARRYING AN AXE.

SAW A BIG FELLOW LEAVING TOWN ON THE SILVERCUT ROADWAY, JUST BEFORE DAWN.

HEADED NORTHWEST, TOWARD WESTRUUN.

THAT'S THE ONE WHO STOLE A HORSE FROM THE LIVERY.

THAT THIEF A FRIEND OF YOURS?

FRIEND?

NOOOO.

WE'RE ACTUALLY HUNTING HIM DOWN. HE OWES *US* MONEY.

I'D BE CAREFUL IF I WERE YOU.

HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE SOMEONE I'D WANT TO MESS WITH.

"OBVIOUSLY, WE GO AFTER HIM."

WE *DO* GO AFTER HIM, RIGHT?

I'LL GO WITH YOU, SCANLAN.

THERE'S LITTLE REASON FOR ME TO STAY HERE IN STILBEN.

AND I NEED TO TRAVEL FOR MY ARAMENTÉ ANYWAY.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, STUBBY, BUT I'M TIRED OF THIS *MUCK.*

MMM. OPERATING AS A GROUP *HAS* BEEN PAYING QUITE WELL.

HRM.

WELL.

THIS IS A BIT AWKWARD...

BETWEEN MY READING LAST NIGHT AND THE FELLOW TRAVELERS I ENCOUNTERED WHILE SEARCHING FOR GROG...

...IT SEEMS MY PERSONAL RESEARCH LEADS ME TOWARD THE ASHEN GORGE.

BUT THAT'S IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

INDEED. I FEAR THAT WE MUST PART WAYS HERE. FOR THE MOMENT, AT LEAST.

BUT I HOPE TO CROSS PATHS WITH YOU ALL AGAIN ONCE I'VE FINISHED THERE.

I'VE VERY MUCH ENJOYED THE COMPANY.

IT *IS* CHEAPER TO RENT FOUR HORSES THAN FIVE.

WHAT? *SOMEONE* HAS TO BE PRACTICAL.

WESTRUUN

OH FAIREST MAID. I PRITHEE HOPE YOU CAN PROVIDE US WITH SOME MUCH-NEEDED HELP.

MY COMPATRIOTS AND I SEEK A MOST CHERISHED FRIEND, WHOM WE BELIEVE MAY HAVE COME THIS WAY.

GOLIATH.

ANSWERS TO GROG, ON OCCASION.

HAS AN AXE.

LIKES ALE.

HAVEN'T SEEN ANY GOLIATHS AROUND LATELY.

BUT ONE USED TO LIVE WITH A COUPLE OF GNOMES AT THE TOP OF THE HILL.

MAYBE THEY CAN HELP.

THANK YOU. YOUR GRACIOUSNESS IS MATCHED ONLY BY YOUR BEAUTY.

AND I CONSIDER MYSELF ***PERSONALLY*** IN YOUR DEBT.

SHE WAS NICE.

YES, I'M SURE THAT'S ***EXACTLY*** WHY SCANLAN WANTED TO TALK TO HER.

HER ***NICENESS.***

AS A FELLOW GNOME, I'LL HANDLE THE TALKING.

KNOCK

HELLO. CAN I HELP YOU?

UUUUHHHHHHH...

WONDERFUL TALK, DARLING.

HELLO! WE'RE LOOKING FOR OUR FRIEND GROG. DO YOU KNOW HIM?

GROG?

MY NAME IS PIKE TRICKFOOT. THIS IS MY GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER, WILHAND.

THEY'RE FRIENDS OF GROG'S, POP-POP.

GROG, YES! SAVED MY LIFE, THAT ONE. A VERY GOOD BOY.

A VERY ***BIG*** BOY...

WE'RE GROG'S ***BEST*** FRIENDS. I'M SHOCKED HE HASN'T MENTIONED ME.

US.

WE'VE BEEN FRIENDS SINCE CHILDHOOD. BUT IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I SAW HIM LAST.

HOW IS HE DOING? HE ISN'T WITH YOU?

THAT'S... THAT'S WHY WE'RE HERE.

GROG'S GONE MISSING. WE'VE TRAVELED HERE LOOKING FOR HIM.

HE UP AND LEFT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT WITHOUT A WORD TO ANYONE.

WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT KNOW WHERE HE'S GOING.

I'M SORRY. I DON'T...

"...BUT THERE MAY BE A WAY TO FIND OUT."

WHAT DID YOU SEE?

WAS IT GROG? IS HE ALL RIGHT?

IF GROG IS HEADED WHERE I BELIEVE HE IS...

...HE IS IN TERRIBLE DANGER.

GROG MY BOY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING AT GATSHADOW?

A BAD PLACE. A VERY BAD PLACE.

DON'T WORRY. WE'LL FIND HIM.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT GATSHADOW, MR. TRICK-FOOT?

MM?

WELL, MANY AROUND HERE CALL IT THE CURSED MOUNTAIN.

"THEY SAY ***MADNESS*** LIES DEEP BENEATH THE ROCK.

"A POWER THAT DRAWS ALL MANNER OF VILE THINGS TO IT."

VILE, HUH?

THAT'S CERTAINLY ONE WAY TO DESCRIBE GROG.

BIG IDIOT.

IT'S OKAY TO BE WORRIED ABOUT HIM.

WE'D BETTER GET GOING.

"WE"? WE'RE A WE NOW?

IT'S GOING TO BE INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS.

YOU SHOULD REALLY STAY HERE. LEAVE THIS TO US PROFESSIONALS.

I *KNOW* IT'S DANGEROUS. THAT'S WHAT THE ARMOR AND THE WEAPONS ARE FOR.

GROG IS MY FRIEND. AND IF HE'S IN TROUBLE, I'M GOING TO HELP.

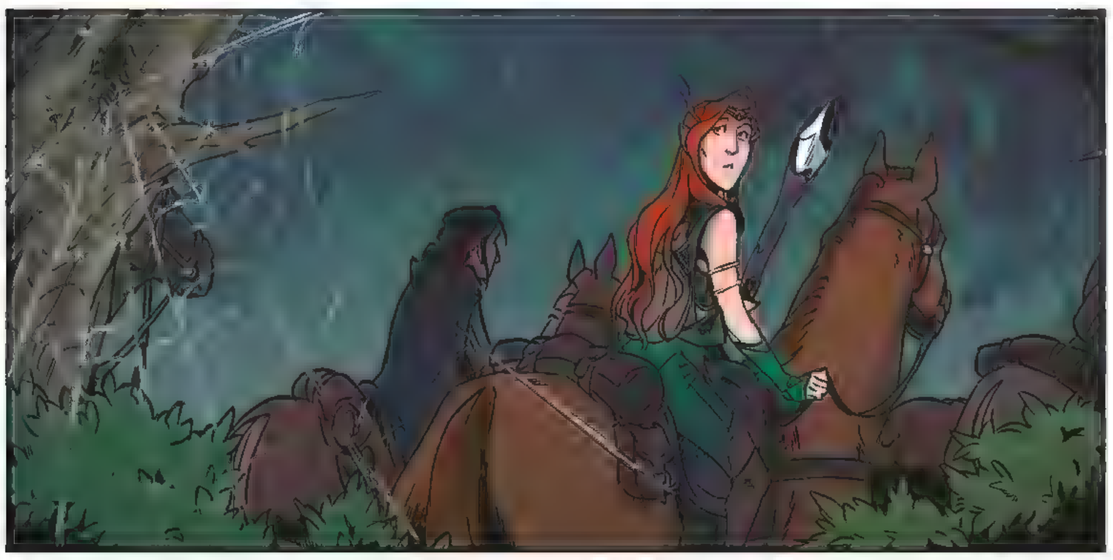
BESIDES, THE EVERLIGHT CAN PROVIDE US GUIDANCE IN FINDING HIM.

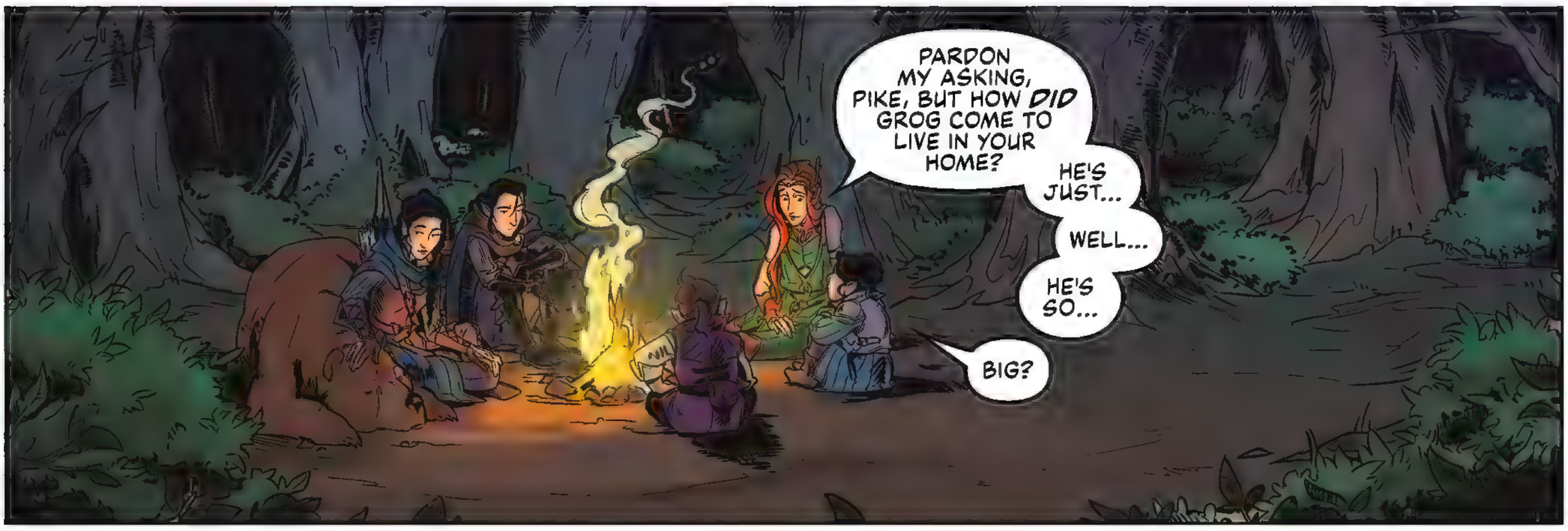
UNLESS ONE OF *YOU* HAPPENS TO BE A CLERIC.

I GUESS WE'RE A WE NOW.

GOOD LUCK! KEEP THEM SAFE, PIKE!

WELL AREN'T YOU JUST THE CUTEST!
I WISH I WAS A BEAR.




PARDON MY ASKING, PIKE, BUT HOW *DID* GROG COME TO LIVE IN YOUR HOME?
HE'S JUST...
WELL...
HE'S SO...
BIG?

BIG. YES.

IT'S THANKS TO GROG THAT MY POP-POP IS STILL ALIVE.

WILHAND WAS NEARLY KILLED BY A GROUP OF HALF-GIANTS WHO WERE PASSING THROUGH.

"OVER HIS PRODUCE, OF ALL THINGS.

"THEY THOUGHT IT WOULD MAKE FOR AN EASY MEAL.

"BUT ONE FELT SORRY FOR HIM, BEING SO SMALL AND ALONE. HE PROTESTED THEIR PLANS TO AMBUSH OLD WILHAND.

"THAT WAS GROG.

"THE OTHERS BEAT HIM NEARLY TO DEATH FOR SHOWING MERCY. HIS OWN UNCLE...

"WILHAND AND I TOOK HIM IN AND NURSED HIM BACK TO HEALTH."

AND AFTER THAT...WELL, HE PRETTY MUCH BECAME OUR PROTECTOR.

AND MY BEST FRIEND.

SUCH A COINCIDENCE! HE'S ***MY*** BEST FRIEND TOO.

IT'S LIKE WE'RE ***PRACTICALLY*** FAMILY ALREADY.

I'M GLAD HE'S MADE SUCH GOOD FRIENDS ON HIS TRAVELS.

I KNOW HE WANTS TO ROAM THE LANDS.

PROVE TO EVERYONE HOW STRONG HE IS.

ESPECIALLY HIMSELF.

BUT I'VE MISSED HIM DEARLY.

HEL--!

VAX?

PUT.
MY BROTHER.
DOWN.

KKBEEEEE!

DAMN IT, VAX...

TRY TO AVOID THE HEAD! I NEED THE FANGS!

YOUR MOTHER WAS A DUNG BEETLE! AN ***UGLY*** DUNG BEETLE!

DO YOU WANT ME TO--

JUST BRING ME THE FANGS.

FUNNY THING ABOUT NATURE...

...THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION OFTEN COME IN THE SAME PACKAGE.

ARE YOU SURE YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING?

YES.

I COULD ALSO--

KAK KAK

THAT'S ANOTHER ONE YOU OWE ME, BROTHER.

THANKS.

OW.

JUST SO YOU KNOW, FOR THE FUTURE...

...I CAN HEAL PEOPLE.

POISON, INJURIES. QUITE A FEW THINGS, REALLY.

THAT'S WONDERFUL!

OH, YOU'LL DEFINITELY COME IN HANDY.

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING EARLIER?

I DON'T LIKE THIS PLACE.

I AGREE WITH ANTLERS. LET'S FIND GROG AND GET OUT OF HERE.

FREE ALE! ALL YOU CAN DRINK!

IT'S ALWAYS WORKED BEFORE.

LET ME TRY...

THIS WAY, PLEASE.

I RECOGNIZE THAT LIVERY. THAT MUST BE THE HORSE GROG STOLE.

I'M HALF-SURPRISED HE DIDN'T EAT IT.

FREE AL--

DARLING, WE MIGHT NOT WANT TO LET WHATEVER LIVES IN THE DARK, OMINOUS HOLE KNOW THAT WE'RE COMING, HMM?

clink

clink

IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S IN ABYSSAL...

THERE'S NOT MUCH LEFT. SOMETHING ABOUT A TRANSFORMATION? LIFE BEYOND LIFE?

AND A NAME. DRATH MEPHRUN.

LIFE BEYOND LIFE DOESN'T SOUND TERRIBLE AND THREATENING AT ***ALL.***

WE NEED TO FIND GROG.

...I FOUND GROG.

ALL THE SKELETONS IN THE CRYPT ARE GONE. I'VE SEARCHED EVERYWHERE. THEY'RE NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.

UGH...

GOOD NEWS, EVERYBODY...

BAD NEWS, EVERYTHING *ELSE* HAPPENING IN HERE.

IS THAT DRATH... MEFUNRUNYUN?

WHATEVER IT IS, WE *NEED* TO STOP IT.

TARGET THE SHADE. GET IT AWAY FROM GROG IF YOU CAN.

IS SHE IN *CHARGE* NOW?

WHAT SHE *IS* IS RIGHT.

TOK

YOU *DARE?!*

PRETTY MUCH ALWAYS, YEAH.

SSHK

SSHK

SAHK

SSHH

BY THE MIGHT OF THIS FATHER AND SON, ONE DEAD AND ONE LIVING...

...SLAY THESE WORTHLESS CATTLE.

DID THAT *THING* JUST CALL ME A *COW*?!

SO *THAT'S* WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO FOCUS ON RIGHT NOW.

THNK
IT'S VERY HARD TO BE YOUR FRIEND SOMETIMES...
RRRUUHH!
FFFT
GRAAAHH!

I WILL DROWN YOU IN SUFFERING!

YOU CAN CERTAINLY TRY.

SOME HELP WOULD BE GOOD! ANY TIME NOW!

OW.

GROG? CAN YOU HEAR ME?

PIKE?

PIKE! I MISSED YOU!

OH. HI EVERYBODY.

YOU ALL KNOW EACH OTHER NOW?

THEY CAME LOOKING FOR YOU. THEY WERE WORRIED.

I WAS TOO.

UH, SORRY I KIND OF TRIED TO KILL YOU. COULDN'T REALLY HELP IT.

BUT IT WAS A ***REALLY*** FUN FIGHT, WASN'T IT?

YES. ***SO*** FUN.

CAN WE ***LEAVE*** NOW?

I GOTTA DO ONE THING FIRST...

...WILL YOU ALL HELP ME BURY MY DAD?

I, UH, GUESS NO ONE HERE KNEW MY DAD BUT ME.

STONEJAW STRONGJAW WAS--

WAIT.

YOUR FATHER'S NAME WAS ***STONEJAW STRONGJAW?!***

YEAH?

NOW MIGHT NOT BE THE BEST TIME, SCANLAN.

STONEJAW STRONGJAW WAS VERY STRONG. AND VERY BIG. AND MY DAD.

AND, UH... I GUESS HE DIED AFTER HE DISAPPEARED AROUND HERE.

HE LET MY UNCLE ABANDON ME FOR DEAD AFTER I HELPED WILHAND. SO MAYBE HE WASN'T THE BEST DAD.

BUT HE WAS THE ONE I HAD.

"THERE'S JUST ONE THING I DON'T UNDERSTAND."

IF THAT SHADE WAS DRATH, WHY DID THEY BOTHER TO LURE GROG ALL THE WAY OUT HERE?

USE THE BIG SKELETON TO SUMMON SOMETHING THAT'S ALSO BIG BUT ***NOT*** A SKELETON?

IT MAKES SENSE IF YOU WANT MUSCLE WITH ACTUAL MUSCLE.

THERE HAS TO BE MORE TO IT THAN THAT. WHAT WAS THAT WHOLE RITUAL ABOUT?

WHATEVER IT WAS, WE STOPPED IT. THAT'S THE IMPORTANT PART.

RIGHT?

ARE YOU FEELING OKAY, GROG?

YEAH. THINK SO.

JUST ITCHES, IS ALL.

SKRSH

SKRSH

WESTRUUN

THIS IS BAD. VERY, VERY BAD.

THERE HAS TO BE *SOMEONE* WHO CAN HELP GROG.

HERE YOU GO, HANDSOME.

MAYBE LATER YOU CAN TELL ME WHAT *BRAVE DEEDS* EARNED YOU THAT SCAR.

MY FRIEND JUST BURIED HIS FATHER. THIS ISN'T THE BEST TIME.

A THOUSAND APOLOGIES. I'M SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS.

I KNOW PLENTY OF STORIES MYSELF!

JUST SAYING...

LET'S FACE IT. WE'RE PRETTY MUCH FUCKED.

AND NOT IN THE FUN WAY.

I DUNNO. PIKE DID A PRETTY GOOD JOB HEALING ME.

IT JUST ITCHES A LITTLE, IS ALL.

"MAYBE EVERYBODY WAS WRONG AND I'M PERFECTLY FINE."

BEYOND THE VEIL

I CAN SENSE A CURSED NATURE TO THE BIG FELLOW'S SCAR.

BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THAT'S ABOUT AS MUCH AS I CAN TELL YOU.

LADY KIMA OF VORD HAS FAR MORE KNOWLEDGE OF CURSES ON THIS SCALE.

TEMPLE WARD

I'M VERY SORRY, BUT LADY KIMA IS AWAY ON PILGRIMAGE.

PERHAPS REALMSEER ESKIL RYNDARIEN CAN BE OF AID TO YOU.

HIS KNOWLEDGE OF CURSES IS COMPARABLE TO OUR LADY'S.

GREYSTONE TOWER

CERTAINLY, THE REALMSEER CAN ASSIST YOU WITH SUCH A CURSE.

HIS NEXT AVAILABLE APPOINTMENT IS IN NINE WEEKS.

SHOULD YOUR FRIEND SURVIVE THAT LONG, HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO SEE YOU THEN.

I'M GONNA DIE, AREN'T I?

WE *WON'T* LET THAT HAPPEN.

IF REALMSEER ESKIL IS THE ONLY ONE HERE WHO CAN HELP, WE'LL JUST HAVE TO CONVINCE HIM TO SEE YOU EARLIER.

PERHAPS I CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE...

THE NAME IS DREZ VINA.

I COULDN'T HELP BUT OVERHEAR YOUR LITTLE PROBLEM WITH ACCESSING THE REALMSEER.

COULDN'T *HELP,* HMM?

AND WHAT BUSINESS IS IT OF YOURS?

I REPRESENT, SHALL WE SAY, A RIVAL OF ESKIL'S.

THEY SHALL, OF COURSE, REMAIN NAMELESS.

OF *COURSE* THEY SHALL...

I CAN HELP YOU GAIN ENTRANCE TO GREYSTONE TOWER.

AND ALL I ASK IN RETURN IS FOR YOU TO RETRIEVE THE *SMALLEST* OF ITEMS FOR MY EMPLOYER.

THIS ALL SOUNDS *COMPLETELY* ABOVE BOARD. I'M SURE YOU HAVE *NO* INTENTION OF SCREWING US OVER.

I CAN SENSE YOUR HESITATION.

THAT JUST MEANS YOU'RE NOT A *COMPLETE* IDIOT.

I CAN ASSURE YOU, THIS IS A PLAN THAT WILL PROFIT US *BOTH* GREATLY.

I HAVE A KEY. BUT ESKIL KNOWS WHO I AM AND WHO I WORK FOR.

YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE A NEUTRAL PARTY. UNKNOWN TO ESKIL.

SHINY...

SO WHAT'S THIS PLAN OF YOURS?

IT'S ALL QUITE SIMPLE.

"I DISCOVERED A SECRET ENTRANCE TO THE TOWER DEEP IN THE SEWERS OF WESTRUUN.

"MY EMPLOYER CRAFTED THIS GEM TO OPEN IT SAFELY.

"ONCE YOU BREACH THE TOWER, YOU WILL NEED TO AVOID ANY SORT OF VIOLENT CONFRONTATION.

"ALL OF YOU TOGETHER WOULDN'T BE A MATCH FOR THE REALMSEER IF IT CAME DOWN TO A FIGHT.

"INSTEAD, MAKE YOUR WAY UP TO HIS STUDY. MEET HIM THERE ON YOUR ***OWN*** TERMS.

"THIS SHOULD AMUSE HIM ENOUGH TO LISTEN TO YOUR REQUESTS.

"ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU RECOVER AN ITEM THAT ESKIL... ***ACQUIRED*** FROM MY MASTER.

"A SMALL BRASS BOX WITH A SINGLE PEARL EMBEDDED IN THE LID. AS I SAID, A MERE BAUBLE."

MY EMPLOYER WILL PAY TWO THOUSAND GOLD FOR THE RETURN OF HIS PRIZE.

AND YOU'LL BYPASS THE WAIT TO MEET WITH THE REALMSEER. WE ALL WIN.

TWO THOUSAND GOLD IS CERTAINLY BETTER THAN WE'VE BEEN PAID FOR OTHER JOBS.

IT DOESN'T SOUND *THAT* DANGEROUS.

AND WE DON'T KNOW WHEN LADY KIMA WILL BE BACK...

IF WE DON'T GET TO FIGHT, WE--

KACK KACK

OW.

WE'LL DO IT. WE'LL TAKE THE JOB.

EXCELLENT.

YOU'RE MAKING THE *RIGHT* CHOICE.

I HATE SEWERS.

JUST THINK OF THE TWO THOUSAND GOLD.

I AM. IT DOESN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT THE SMELL.

THIS IS WHERE DREZ SAID THE DOOR WOULD BE...

MAYBE "DOOR" MEANS SOMETHING ELSE WHERE HE COMES FROM?

IF THIS WAS ALL SOME SORT OF TRICK, THAT ELF WILL BE THE ONE GOING INTO THE SEWER.

IN PIECES.

IF THE REALMSEER IS AS POWERFUL AS WE'VE HEARD...

...THE DOOR MAY BE HIDDEN.

LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH, THEN.

DREZ WAS TELLING THE TRUTH. IT'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.

HE COULD HAVE GIVEN US SOME *INSTRUCTIONS.*

LET ME TRY.

IF WE TOUCH IT TO THE MAGIC I SAW IN THE WALL...

tok!

MAYBE DREZ'S MASTER IS REALLY BAD AT MAKING KEYS?

OH!

OH! I HAVE AN IDEA!

LET ME GO NEXT!

DOES THIS SEEM LIKE A TERRIBLE IDEA TO ANYONE ELSE?

BE CAREFUL, GROG.

TAKE THIS, DOOR!

GROG, DON--

FSSH

OH. HUH.

YOU BIG *IDIOT!* HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO--

I *TOLD* YOU I HAD AN IDEA.

I SUPPOSE IT HAD TO HAPPEN SOMEDAY...

SEE, THIS HERE'S WHY I SHOULD BE THE LEADER OF THE GROUP.

WE'RE ALL *REALLY* SMART, BUT I'M THE SMARTEST AND THE STRONGEST AND THE BEST LOO--

SHFFFSH

WWWVGGGGGGGGGGGH

HOW ABOUT YOU *DON'T* GO FIRST?

MMM.

AAHAHAHAHA!

OH VEX, YOU SHOULD SEE YOUR HAIR RIGHT NOW!

WUURRR

TRINKET SAYS "STOP TRYING TO GET US KILLED, YOU LUMBERING MORON. IT'S HARD FOR US TO SAVE YOUR LIFE IF WE'RE DEAD."

YEAH, THAT'S FAIR.

I CAN SEE LIGHT AHEAD.

GAH!

PRESSURE TRAP.

IF YOU PUT ANY WEIGHT ON IT...

I HAVE ANOTHER IDEA!

OH GODS, WHAT NOW?

LET IT BE NOTED I DIDN'T AGREE TO THIS...

OOF!

THAT WASN'T ***ANOTHER*** IDEA.

THAT WAS THE ***SAME*** IDEA YOU HAD BEFORE!

STAY BEHIND ME, PLEASE.

FSSHHH

SHE COULDN'T HAVE JUST DONE THAT FROM THE START?

AND DEPRIVED YOU OF AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OFF?

ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE. STEP CAREFULLY.

WAIT, THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.

WE CAN'T HAVE GOTTEN TO THE TOP *ALREADY.*

YOU'RE RIGHT. THE LAYOUT OF THIS PLACE IS IMPOSSIBLE.

THE REALMSEER MUST HAVE USED MAGIC TO CONSTRUCT THIS PLACE.

WE'RE SURROUNDED BY IT.

THE AMOUNT OF TIME THIS MUST HAVE TAKEN...

SOMEONE'S COMING!

HIDE!

PIKE!

HMM?

OH. HELLO.

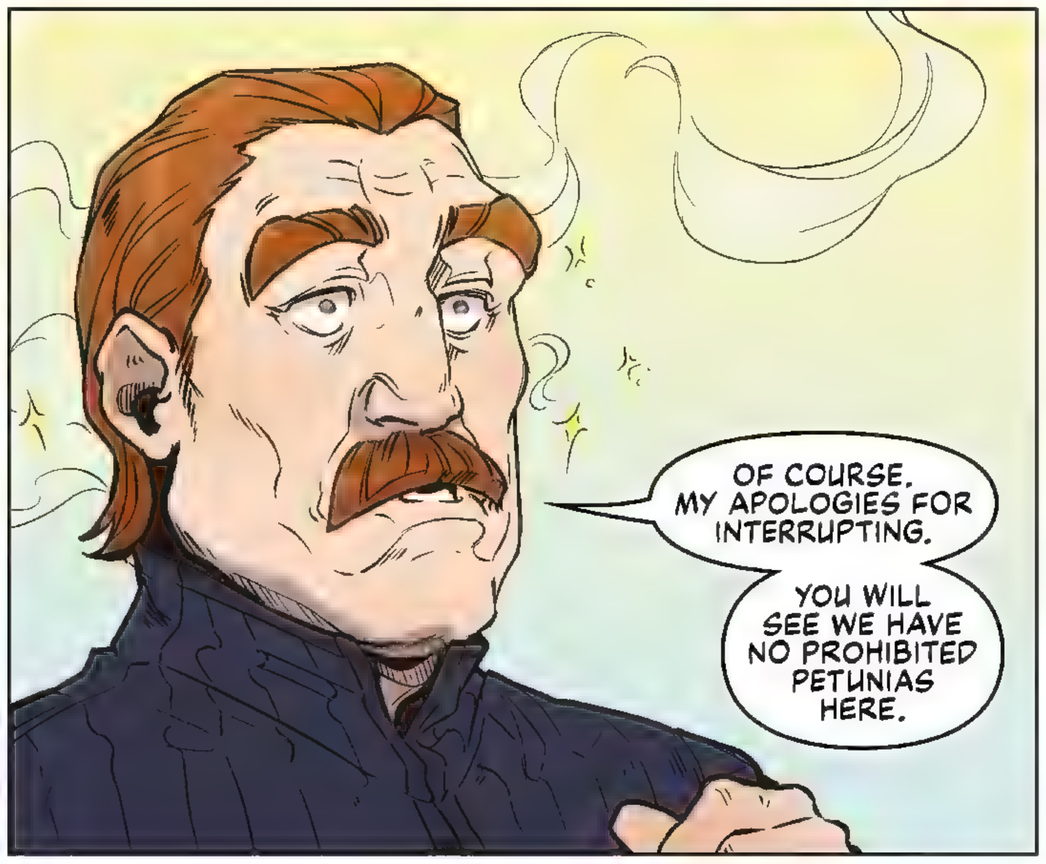
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?! HOW DID YOU GAIN ACCESS TO THE TOWER?!
UM. WELL. IT'S A VERY FUNNY STORY...

SHE'S WITH ME.

BURT REYNOLDS. TAL'DOREI CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT.
ARE YOU AWARE OF THE RUMORS THAT THERE ARE ILLEGALLY IMPORTED PLANTS ON THE PREMISES?

DO YOU UNDERSTAND JUST HOW SERIOUSLY TAL'DOREI TREATS FLORAL FRAUD?
I DON'T--
I'M SURE IF YOU SPEAK TO REALMSEER ESKIL...

REALMSEER ESKIL KNOWS WE'RE HERE, OF COURSE.
HE'D WANT YOU TO LEAVE US ALONE TO COMPLETE OUR INSPECTION.


OF COURSE. MY APOLOGIES FOR INTERRUPTING.
YOU WILL SEE WE HAVE NO PROHIBITED PETUNIAS HERE.

THANK YOU, SCANLAN.

BURT REYNOLDS IS HERE FOR YOU, BABY.

COME ON, "BURT."

THWAP

BE CAREFUL. IF ANY ROOM IN THIS MADHOUSE WAS GOING TO BE FULL OF TRAPS...

OVER THERE! THAT LOOKS LIKE THE BOX DREZ WAS TALKING ABOUT.

DOESN'T LOOK LIKE MUCH.

BUT IF IT'S WORTH TWO THOUSAND GOLD TO SOMEONE, I WOULD GUESS IT'S QUITE POWERFUL.

WE STILL DON'T KNOW WHO DREZ WANTED US TO STEAL IT ***FOR.***

DOES IT FEEL ***WRONG*** TO ANYONE ELSE?

COMING TO REALMSEER ESKIL TO ASK FOR HELP, AND THEN ROBBING HIM AT THE SAME TIME?

YOU'RE RIGHT, ANTLERS. SOME THINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN GOLD.

WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH MY SISTER?

THE ELF WON'T BE HAPPY ABOUT THIS. AND IF THE PERSON HE WORKS FOR IS AS POWERFUL AS ESKIL...

BUT WHAT'S THE POINT OF HELPING GROG IF WE HELP UNLEASH ANOTHER TERRIBLE THING?

WE CAN DEAL WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING THE DEAL IF AND WHEN THEY HAPPEN.

WELL NOW. THIS IS CERTAINLY A UNIQUE DISCUSSION.

I'M IMPRESSED BY YOUR SENSE OF MORALITY, FOR A GROUP THAT BROKE INTO MY HOME.

YOU'VE KINDLED MY CURIOSITY.

COME UP TO MY STUDY. I'D LIKE US TO HAVE A CONVERSATION.

THIS DOESN'T FEEL PARTICULARLY *OPTIONAL* TO ME.

WE CAME FOR HIS HELP, DIDN'T WE?

THERE YOU ARE.

I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU SINCE YOU ENTERED MY TOWER. SUCH A FASCINATING BUNCH.

WHO EXACTLY *ARE* YOU?

WE ARE BUT A HUMBLE GROUP OF ADVENTURERS, HONORED TO BE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE RENOWNED REALMSEER ESKIL.

WE COME SEEKING YOUR AID ON THE MATTER OF CURSES, AS RECOMMENDED BY ABJURIST NOJA.

OUR FRIEND GROG WAS...TAKEN AWAY BY A...SORT OF SHADOW THING?

ALMOST LIKE A LICH, BUT NOT QUITE. AND HE DID SOMETHING TO GROG. A RITUAL.

WE KILLED IT AND STOPPED THE RITUAL. BUT GROG STILL HAS THIS SCAR EVEN AFTER I HEALED HIM.

SEE, MY DAD CAME TO ME IN A SORTA DREAM, EVEN THOUGH HE'S DEAD.

AND THEN THE SHADOW THING MADE ME FIGHT MY FRIENDS WITH A BUNCH OF SKELETONS.

WE FOUND A BOOK IN THE LAIR OF THE SHADE. THERE WAS A NAME IN IT.

DRATH MEPHRUHN.

DRATH MEPHRUHN. I KNOW THAT NAME.

THERE WAS A STUDENT AT THE ALABASTER LYCEUM, LONG AGO...

HE WAS OUSTED FROM THE COLLEGE AT A YOUNG AGE. DABBLING IN DARK, FORBIDDEN THINGS.

LET ME TAKE A LOOK AT THIS SCAR OF YOURS.

COULD YOU COUGH FOR ME, MY LARGE FRIEND?

UH *HURM!*

KACK

KACK

IT IS AS I FEARED. I KNOW THE NATURE OF THIS CURSE.

YOU MAY HAVE DESTROYED DRATH MEPHRUHN'S PREVIOUS FORM, BUT HIS MAKESHIFT RITE OF LICHDOM SUCCEEDED.

HE WILL BE BROUGHT BACK TO HIS PHYLACTERY, THE RECEPTACLE THAT HOLDS HIS SOUL, IN MERE WEEKS.

AND IT'S HIDDEN ***WITHIN*** THE BODY OF YOUR FRIEND.

UH. THAT SOUNDS BAD...

REALMSEER ESKIL'S LIBRARY

THIS ONE SHOULD HELP...

CAN'T YOU JUST GET IT OUT WITH MAGIC INSTEAD OF...

...BOOK WORDS?

REMOVING THE PHYLACTERY WITHOUT A PROTECTION RITUAL IN PLACE WOULD DESTROY YOUR FORM INSTANTLY.

I COULD ALWAYS KILL YOU, REMOVE THE PHYLACTERY FROM YOUR CHEST, AND RESURRECT YOU.

HOWEVER, THE NECROMANCY INVOLVED IS... CORROSIVE.

THAT PROCESS WOULD HAVE A STRONG PROBABILITY OF FAILURE.

YEAH, LET'S ***NOT*** DO THAT?

WE'LL FIND A BETTER WAY, GROG.

AH! THERE WE GO.

THAT'S A "HOORAY, I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO DO!" SORT OF FROWN, RIGHT?

IN PART. I ***HAVE*** LOCATED THE PROPER RITUAL TO EXTRACT THE FOUL OBJECT WHILE PROTECTING YOUR FRIEND.

HOWEVER, I'M MISSING TWO OF THE KEY COMPONENTS.

THE HEART OF A NYMPH...

...AND THE SKULL OF A NIGHTMARE.

THEN WE GET THEM!

...WHERE DO WE GET THEM?

I HAVE COMPATRIOTS WHO KEEP ME APPRISED OF RUMORS OF FIENDISH OCCURRENCES.

THEY'VE TOLD ME OF A HIDDEN CULT IN THE NORTHERN UMBRA HILLS NEAR THE MINING TOWN OF JORENN VILLAGE.

"THE RUMOR IS THEY HAVE BEEN SEEN DANCING WITH A FIERY HORSE.

"THAT ***COULD*** BE THE NIGHTMARE WE SEEK.

"NYMPHS ARE HARD TO FIND, AND HARDER TO SURVIVE. THEIR BEAUTY CAN STRIKE ONE BLIND...OR WORSE.

"LORE MENTIONS BUT ONE KNOWN IN TAL'DOREI, DEEP WITHIN THE EVER-WINTER FOREST OF THE FROSTWEALD."

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE. I'D SUGGEST SPLITTING YOUR EFFORTS.

I'M WITH PIKE.

BUT WE ALL JUST GOT BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. AND NOW WE HAVE TO SPLIT UP?

SO YOU DON'T DIE A HORRIBLE, PAINFUL DEATH.

OH, YEAH. I GUESS THAT'S TRUE.

DON'T WORRY. I'M SURE WE'LL ALL BE BACK TOGETHER SOON.

AS LONG AS NONE OF *US* DIE HORRIBLE, PAINFUL DEATHS...

TEAM NYMPH HEART.

HERE WE ARE. THE FOREST OF THE FROSTWEALD.

DOESN'T SEEM VERY WINTERY.

YOU WERE SAYING?

PRETTY...

I MISS THE PRETTY!

WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO REST HERE FOR A BIT.

AHH!

THAT LOOKS *JUST* LIKE A PERSON!

WHO LEAVES A NICE STATUE LIKE THIS WAY OUT IN THE WOODS WHERE NO ONE CAN SEE IT?

THERE'S *NEVER* A GOOD ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION...

SHOULD WE CHECK THE OTHERS?

I SUSPECT WE'LL FIND THE SAME THING.

GROG?

OH, I AM *NOT* DOING THIS AGAIN.

SMASH

HEY! WHAT'D YOU DO THAT FOR?

BECAUSE YOU TRYING TO *KILL US ALL* ONCE WAS ENOUGH!

SHHH!

SOMETHING'S COMING.

SSHHHFFF

BASILISKS!

AVOID LOOKING IN THEIR EYES!

THEY CAN PETRIFY YOU IF YOU DO!

PETRI HUH?

TURN YOU TO STONE, DARLING.

ALTHOUGH NOT SURE WE COULD TELL THE DIFFERENCE.

KEEP YOUR EYES COVERED, TRINKET!

SSHHHFFF

SKREEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

DID I GET IT?

IT SOUNDS LIKE I GOT IT.

SKRI--

WOMF

YOU ALMOST GOT IT.

GRAAAH!

OOF!

BE MORE CAREFU--

WELL SHIT.

OVER HERE!

GET OUTTA THE WAY IF YOU'RE NOT A THING I'M GONNA KILL!

HUH?

SHREEEEEEEEE

YOU NEED TO--

VEX?

HEY, I GOT IT!

...OH.

FUCK ME RUNNING.

LOOKS LIKE SHE GOT POOPRI-FIED...

PETRIFIED. AND DON'T TOUCH HER.

IF SHE BREAKS IN THIS STATE...

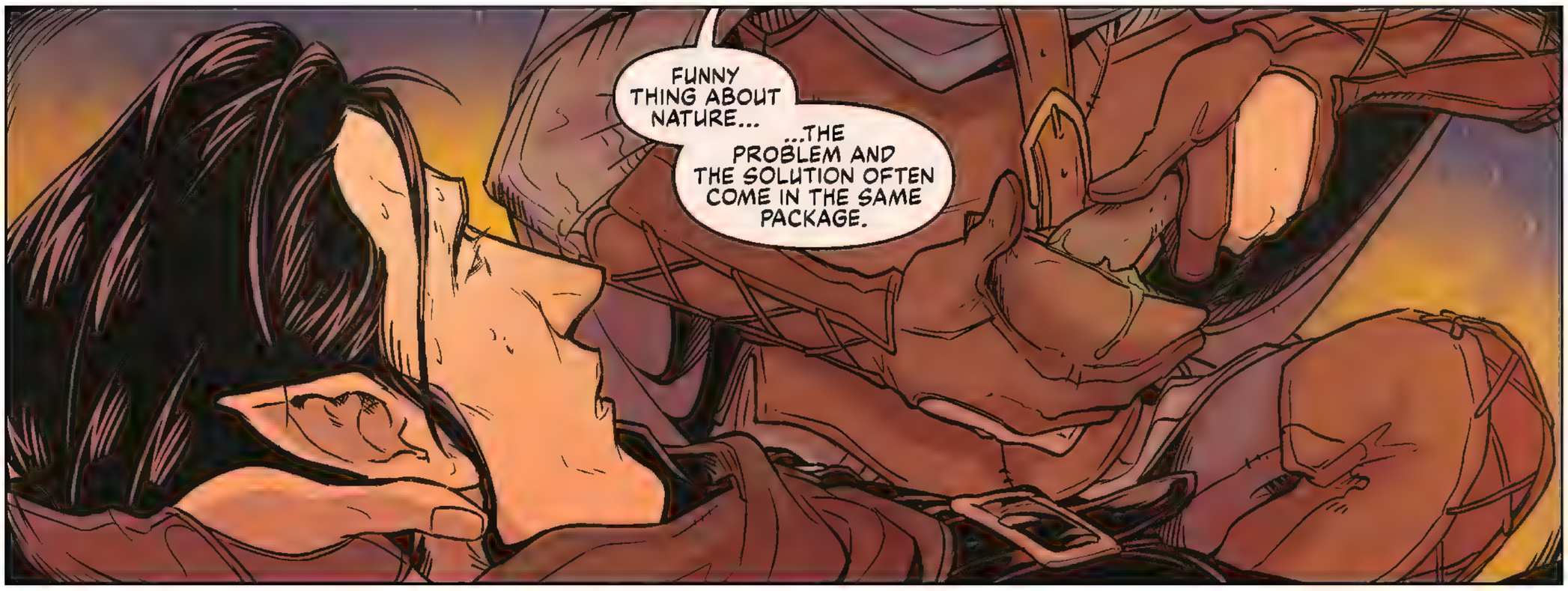
OH. YEAH. THAT WOULD BE BAD.

HOW DO WE FIX HER?

SHE SAID "YOU NEED TO" BEFORE SHE--

WE NEED TO *WHAT?!*

WAIT...


FUNNY THING ABOUT NATURE...
...THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION OFTEN COME IN THE SAME PACKAGE.

THAT'S IT.

GROG! WE NEED BLOOD FROM THE BASILISK YOU KILLED!
UH, RIGHT!

GRAAAAAAH!

I FOUND THE BLOOD!
THAT YOU DID.

THIS BETTER WORK, STUBBY.

IT WAS *YOUR* IDEA.

UGH.

I NEED A BATH.

AND NOW *YOU* NEED A BATH TOO.

DON'T EAT THAT, TRINKET DARLING.

YOU'RE WELCOME, STUBBY.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER PEPPER-FRIED PEOPLE?

WE SHOULD MAKE SURE WE GET THE NYMPH'S HEART ***BEFORE*** FREEING THEM, RIGHT?

RIGHT. CHANCES ARE, MOST OF THEM WERE HERE FOR THE SAME REASON.

WE DON'T NEED THE COMPETITION.

BESIDES, TIME DOESN'T REALLY PASS FOR THEM IN THAT STATE.

AND IF WE FREE THEM ON THE WAY BACK, WE CAN HELP GUIDE THEM OUT.

FOR A ***VERY*** REASONABLE FEE, OF COURSE.

OF COURSE.

TIME TO GO, GROG. LEAVE THAT ALONE.

YUP. LEAVING ALONE.

I THINK WE'RE GETTING CLOSE...

CAREFUL, EVERYONE. DON'T MAKE A--

CRACK

WUUURH

OH, WHAT DID YOU FIND THERE TRINKET?!

SO IT'S OKAY WHEN THE **BEAR** DOES IT...

OH.
EW.
I GUESS WE KNOW WHAT THE NYMPH USES FOR FERTILIZER.
WE NEED A PLAN OF ATTACK.
THE FOUR OF US COULD PROBABLY SURROUND THE WATER. STRIKE FROM ALL SIDES.
YOU THINK SHE HASN'T FACED DOWN GROUPS BEFORE? YOU HEARD WHAT ESKIL SAID.
H BLAH BLAH BLAH
H BLAH DAGGER BLAH
AH DAGGER DAGGER B
H BLAH BLAH BLAH
AH BLAH BLAH BL
H BLAH HUNTER'S B
AH MARK BLAH BL
H BLAH BLAH BL

IF WE CAN LURE HER FAR ENOUGH AWAY FROM THE WATER, IT COULD WORK.

AWAY FROM THIS GROVE AND INTO THE ICE...

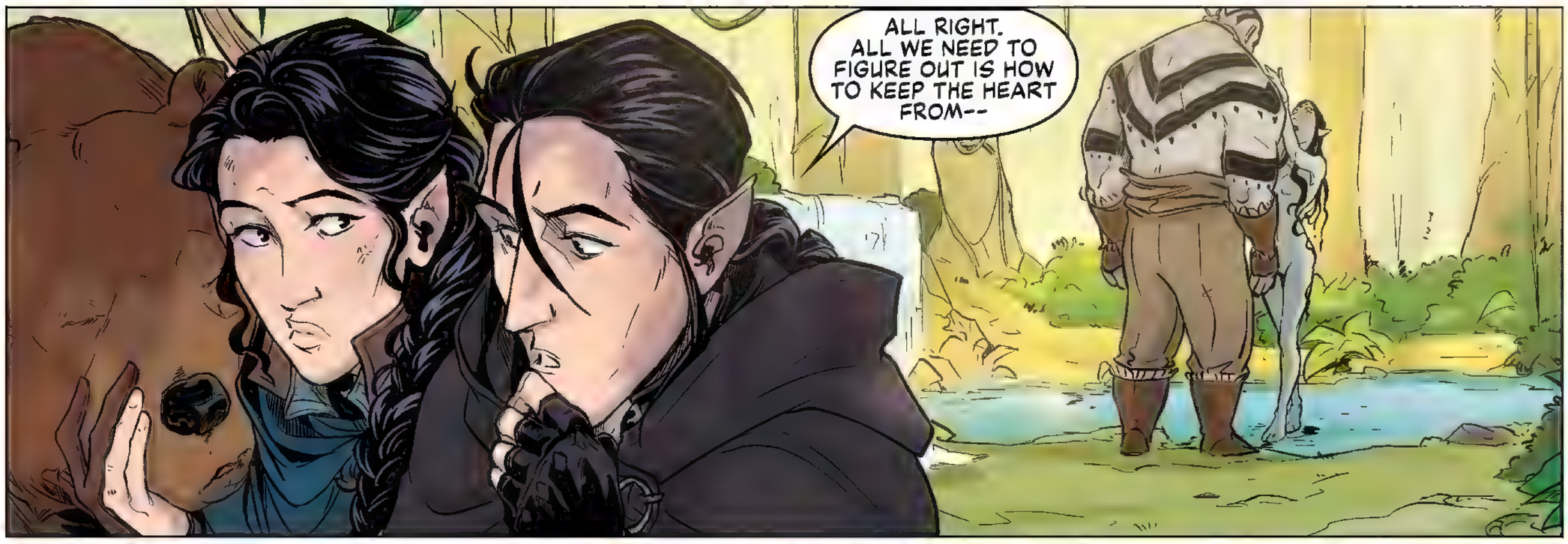
HI.

WHO GOES THERE?!

NAME'S GROG. I UH...I JUST WANTED TO SAY...

WELL, YOU'RE REALLY PRETTY. LIKE, THE PRETTIEST GIRL I'VE EVER SEEN.

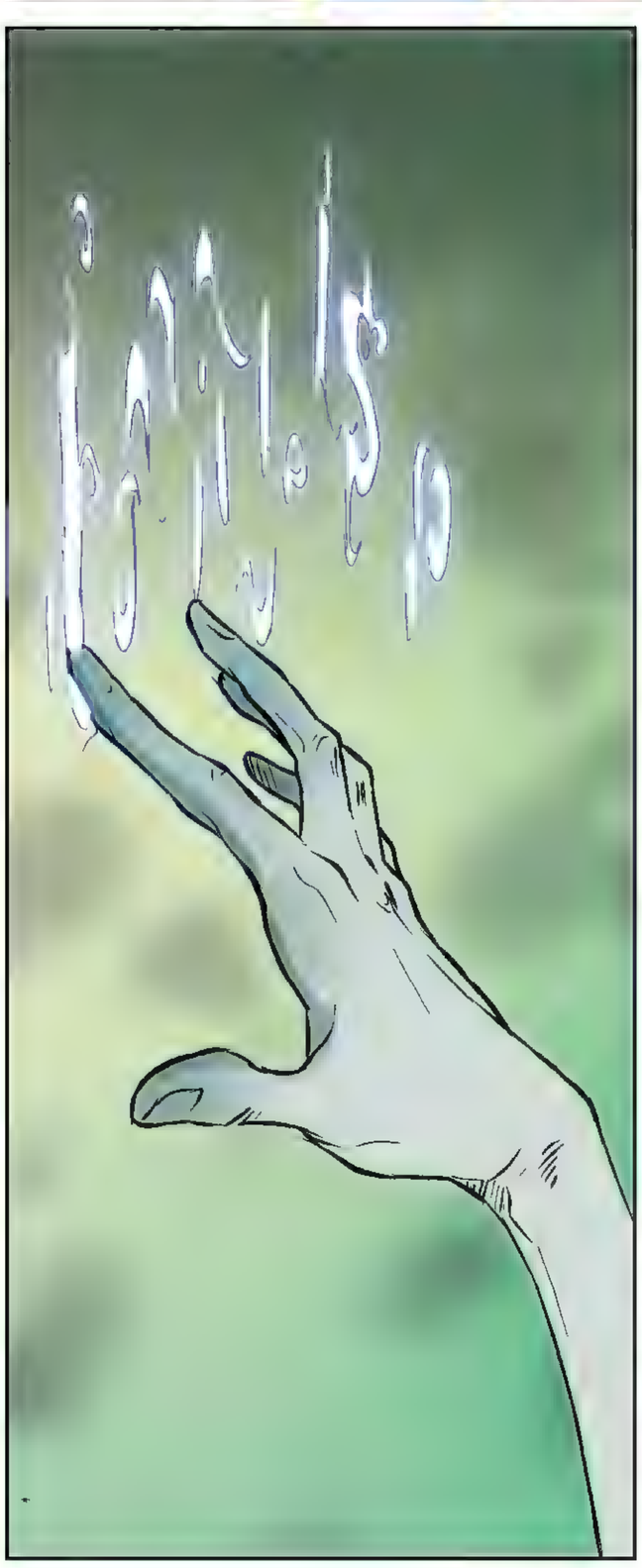
WELL, AREN'T YOU SWEET...


ALL RIGHT. ALL WE NEED TO FIGURE OUT IS HOW TO KEEP THE HEART FROM--

HEY GUYS!
NAHLA SAID I SHOULD GO SEE THIS REALLY GREAT FEY PLACE WITH HER.

SO, UH... I GUESS I'LL SEE YOU LATER?

"NAHLA"?!
GROG, WAIT A--



GROG!
DON'T!
I KNOW HE'S AN IDIOT, BUT I DIDN'T THINK HE'D BE *STUPID* ENOUGH TO TRUST A FEY CREATURE!
HE'S PROBABLY BEING EATEN ALIVE ON THE OTHER SIDE.
IF HE'S LUCKY.
WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT SUPPOSED TO DO?!
I DON'T FUCKING KNOW!

WHAT DO WE DO? DO WE WAIT FOR HIM?

AT LEAST IT'S WARM IN HERE...

LOOK!

THAT IS A VERY PERSONAL QUESTION.

ALSO, I KINDA DON'T REALLY REMEMBER IT.

BUT SHE GAVE ME THIS.

WAIT, IS THAT--

A NYMPH HEART.

THAT'S WHAT WE NEEDED TO GET, RIGHT?

TEAM NIGHTMARE, THE UMBRA HILLS

ISN'T THIS THE LIFE?

THE WIND AT OUR BACKS, THE ROAD AT OUR FRONTS...

...AND TWO BEAUTIFUL WOMEN AT MY SIDE.

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, SCANLAN? THIS PLACE IS ***AWFUL.***

JUST LOOK AT HOW THE BLIGHT HAS AFFECTED ALL OF THE POOR PLANTS.

IF WE DON'T SUCCEED IN OUR HALF OF THE MISSION, GROG DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE.

AND YOU'RE ACTING LIKE THIS IS ***FUN?***

FINE. EVERYTHING IS AWFUL AND TERRIBLE AND FULL OF PERIL AND OUR BEST FRIEND MIGHT DIE.

CAN'T WE STILL PRETEND TO LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE?

JORENN VILLAGE

HELLO!
LOVELY TO MEET YOU ALL!
JUST PASSING THROUGH!
THIS DOESN'T SEEM LIKE A VERY FRIENDLY PLACE, DOES IT?
A LITTLE LOUDER, KEYLETH. I DON'T THINK THE ***ENTIRE TOWN*** HEARD YOU.
AND IT HELPS IF YOU KNOW ***WHO*** TO TALK TO AND ***HOW*** TO TALK TO THEM.
EXCUSE ME, FAIR LADY!
WHAT'D YOU CALL ME?
MY FRIENDS AND I HAVE COME TO YOUR FINE VILLAGE IN SEARCH OF STRANGE OR CULTISH ACTIVITY.
WE SEEK TO FREE TOWNS SUCH AS YOURS FROM THEIR EVIL INFLUENCE.
CLEARLY, ONE AS LOVELY AND WISE AS YOURSELF WOULD KNOW IF YOUR PEOPLE HAD BEEN BESET BY DARK FORCES.

WELL, CAN'T SAY I KNOW MUCH ABOUT DARK FORCES AND THE LIKE.

BUT THERE ***WAS*** A MAN ARRESTED NOT TOO LONG AGO FOR TRYIN' TO MURDER SOME FOLKS.

HEARD TELL HE WAS SOME KINDA CULT LEADER. THEY'RE KEEPIN' HIM LOCKED UP IN THE JAIL.

YOU HAVE BEEN OF IMMENSE HELP, GENTLEWOMAN.

WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO DIRECT US TO THE JAIL IN QUESTION?

JUST KEEP HEADIN' DOWN THE ROAD.

EASY ENOUGH TO SPOT.

WE ARE IN YOUR DEBT.

SHAME ON YOU FOR MOCKING THAT POOR WOMAN, SCANLAN.

MOCKING?

A WOMAN WHO HAS LIVED THAT LONG...

...SHE KNOWS ALL ***KINDS*** OF THINGS.

...WHAT KINDS OF THINGS?

I BEG YOUR PARDON.

JUST A BIT OF LEGAL HUMOR FOR YOU.

BURT REYNOLDS, CHURCH OF THE LAWBEARER IN EMON. WE'RE HERE INVESTIGATING CULT ACTIVITY.

YES. THE EVERLIGHT GUIDED ME HERE TO BRING LIGHT TO THE DARKNESS.

EVIL IS...VERY BAD.

YOU MUSTA HEARD ABOUT THAT CULT LEADER WE ARRESTED COUPLE WEEKS BACK.

TRIED TO KILL A POOR TRAVELING DOCTOR. WE THINK HE MEANT IT TO BE A HUMAN SACRIFICE.

USED THIS STRANGE CONTRAPTION. A DEMONIC WEAPON OF SOME SORT.

SEEMS LIKE IT'S BROKEN NOW.

HOW STRANGE.

OBVIOUSLY, WE'LL NEED TO KNOW *ALL* THE DETAILS ABOUT HIS...

...CULTINESS.

YOU CAN QUESTION HIM YOURSELF IF YOU WANT.

HE'S BACK THERE.

EASY ENOUGH TO FIND. ONLY PRISONER WE HAVE AT THE MOMENT.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

DOWN WITH EVIL!

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THAT DEVICE?

NO. BUT HOW DANGEROUS CAN THIS CULT GUY BE IF THE PEOPLE *HERE* WERE ABLE TO CAPTURE HIM?

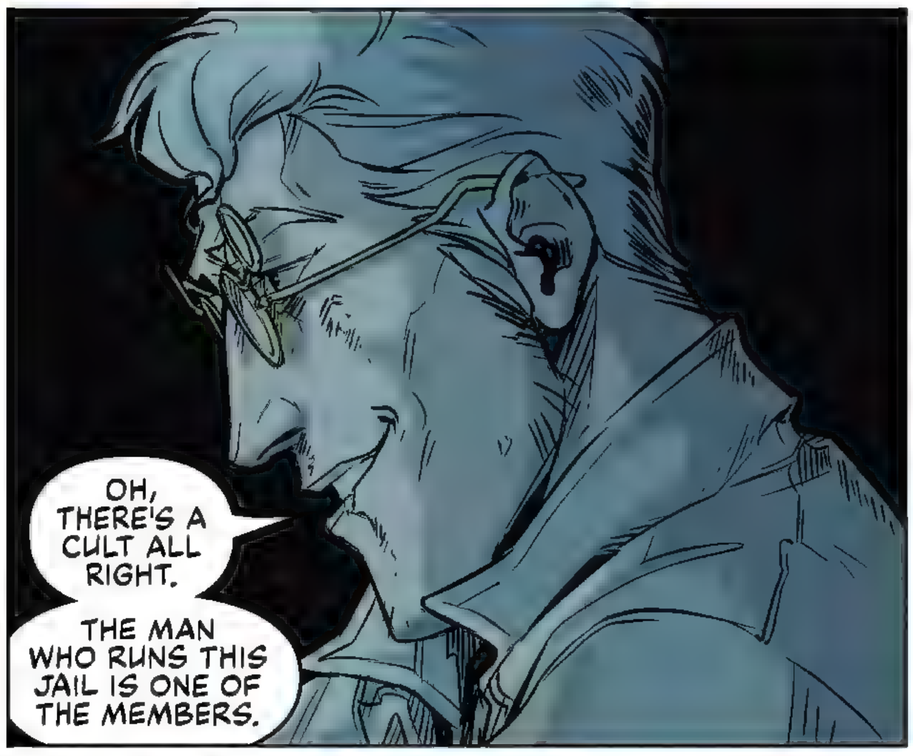
WELL, IF YOU THREE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE MY LEGAL COUNSEL...

...I'M IN *FAR* MORE TROUBLE THAN I THOUGHT.

WE'RE HERE TO TALK TO YOU ABOUT YOUR NIGHTMARE CULT.
AND YOU'RE GOING TO TELL US EVERYTHING.

I WOULD BE HAPPY TO.
EXCEPT FOR THE FACT THAT I DON'T HAVE A CULT.
OH! BUT...
SORRY. WE WERE TOLD YOU WERE A CULT LEADER BY THE JAILER.

YOU THINK YOU CAN PULL ONE OVER ON US, HUH?
WE'VE HEARD THE STORIES.
ARE YOU TRYING TO PRETEND THERE ISN'T AN EVIL CULT ROMPING AROUND THIS VILLAGE, DOING...
CULTY THINGS?
LIKE, SAY... MURDEROUS HUMAN SACRIFICES?


OH, THERE'S A CULT ALL RIGHT.
THE MAN WHO RUNS THIS JAIL IS ONE OF THE MEMBERS.

BUT HE SEEMED SO NICE...
THIS DEFINITELY COMPLICATES THINGS.

THE ELITE OF THE VILLAGE, IF YOU COULD CALL THEM SUCH IN A PLACE LIKE THIS, ARE INVOLVED.

A DOCTOR I'D BEEN HUNTING FOR...UNRELATED REASONS CAME TO MEET WITH THE LOCAL MINING GUILD.

BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH SUMMONING BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH SACRIFICE BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH

"ONLY, IT WASN'T MINING THAT THEY WERE DISCUSSING.

"I THOUGHT I COULD PROCEED WITH MY PLANS FOR A SURPRISE ATTACK ANYWAY.

"BUT I MISCALCULATED. MY WEAPON MALFUNCTIONED AND I WAS OVERPOWERED.

"THE DOCTOR... DIDN'T THINK I WAS WORTH KILLING. HAD ME THROWN IN HERE INSTEAD."

YOUR WEAPON?

WAS IT THAT WEIRD-LOOKING DOODAD THE JAILER SHOWED US?

YOU KNOW WHERE IT IS?!

YOU HAVE TO SET ME FREE AND SHOW ME WHERE HE'S KEEPING IT.

LOOK, BUDDY.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT KIND OF SCAM YOU'RE TRYING TO PULL ON US.

BUT IT'S PRETTY CONVENIENT THAT THE GUY WHO WANTS OUT OF JAIL IS CLAIMING EVERYONE ***ELSE*** HERE IS EVIL.

YOU COULD ALSO BE A PERFECTLY NICE PERSON!

BUT... SCANLAN DOES HAVE A POINT.

IT'S ***BURT!***

WHEN I'M WEARING THE MUSTACHE, IT'S BURT!

I'M SORRY... BURT.

YOU JUST...LOOK ***SO*** MUCH LIKE MY FRIEND SCANLAN. IT'S REALLY UNCANNY!

WE DIDN'T ACTUALLY COME HERE TO STOP THE NIGHTMARE CULT. WE CAME TO FIND THE NIGHTMARE.

WE NEED ITS SKULL FOR...A QUEST.

YES, I'M SURE YOU'RE ALL EXPERTS AT...WHATEVER IT IS YOU THINK YOU DO.

THE DOCTOR WAS HERE TO DELIVER AN ITEM THE CULTISTS NEED TO PREPARE FOR THEIR "MEETING" ON THE NEW MOON.

THAT'S TONIGHT.

INDEED IT IS. AND I CAN LEAD YOU TO WHERE THEY WILL BE SUMMONING THE NIGHTMARE.

BUT NOT IF I'M IN HERE. AND NOT IF I'M ***UNARMED.***

I DON'T THINK WE HAVE MUCH OF A CHOICE.

WAIT, WHAT ARE WE DOING?

I SUPPOSE I'LL BE SEEING YOU LATER TONIGHT, THEN.

WHAT IN THE--

WOW

SORRY IF YOU'RE NOT ACTUALLY EVIL, BUT ***NOT*** REALLY SORRY IF YOU ACTUALLY ARE.

BRING HIM IN HERE.

MANY THANKS TO YOU AND YOUR COMPATRIOTS.

NOW, WHERE'S MY WEAPON?

HERE YOU GO.

BUT THE JAILER SAID IT'S BROKEN.

THAT HAPPENS FROM TIME TO TIME.

IT SHOULD ONLY TAKE ME A MOMENT TO REPAIR.

AND THEN YOU'LL KEEP YOUR WORD?

MY WORD IS AS GOOD AS MY NAME.

ABOUT THAT, WE NEVER ACTUALLY *GOT* YOUR NAME.

PERCIVAL FREDRICKSTEIN VON MUSEL KLOSSOWSKI DE ROLO III.

OR PERCY FOR SHORT.

OH THANK GODS.

SNAP

THERE WE GO. TIME FOR A LITTLE *REVENGE.*

AND YOUR NOBLE QUEST, OF COURSE.

WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU THREE KNOW ABOUT THIS NIGHTMARE THAT WE'RE GOING UP AGAINST?

IT'S A BIG HORSE? THAT'S ON FIRE?

AND WE NEED ITS SKULL.

GRIM.

I LIKE IT.

YOU'RE A CLERIC OF THE EVERLIGHT, IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN.

NOT EXACTLY SOMEONE I'D EXPECT TO FIND WANDERING AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE, COLLECTING THE SKULLS OF MONSTERS.

IT'S TO SAVE A FRIEND.

MY ***BEST*** FRIEND, ACTUALLY. SINCE I WAS VERY YOUNG.

CHARMING.

...SOON HAVE UNLIMITED POWER IN OUR GRASP.

JASPER SHOULDA BEEN HERE BY NOW...

LOOK, IF HE'S THIS LATE, HE AIN'T COMING.

WE BETTER GET THIS STARTED BEFORE WE LOSE OUR WINDOW.

JASPER'S LOSS, I GUESS.

WAIT!

WE HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL THE NIGHTMARE APPEARS, REMEMBER?

RIGHT.

I'M SURE THIS WILL ALL GO *VERY* WELL.

IT'S COMING.

OH YAY.

THOOM

WHERE IS THE PROMISED APPEASEMENT?

THAT'S A FUCKING NIGHTMARE, ALL RIGHT.

DID WE *KNOW* IT CAME WITH A RIDER?

NOW CAN WE ATTACK?

NOW WE CAN ATTACK.

JUST MAKE SURE YOU DON'T DESTROY THE SKULL.

SOMEONE IS TRYING TO TAKE WHAT'S OURS! THE POWER WE WERE PROMISED!

FIND THEM AND KILL THEM!

NO!

SHE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ANYONE ELSE'S SKULL.

WE TRY NOT TO KILL *EVERY* BAD PERSON WE COME ACROSS.

YOU MIGHT WANT TO TELL *HIM* THAT.

PLEASE! THIS ISN'T MY FAULT! I BROUGHT WHAT YOU--

NOW, WHILE IT'S DISTRACTED.

NGGGH!

HURRY!

BLAM

BLAM

GET READY, GUYS.

THIS COULD GET ROUGH.

THAT'S RIGHT! YOU BETTER RUN!

GUESS HE DIDN'T LIKE HIS HORSE THAT MUCH?

STILL IN ONE PIECE. JUST AS REQUESTED.

YES, IT IS. AND THANK YOU.

WE COULDN'T HAVE MANAGED IT WITHOUT YOUR HELP.

I MEAN, WE WOULD HAVE DONE *OKAY* PROBABLY...

WHERE WILL YOU GO NOW?

AN EXCELLENT QUESTION.

THE TRAIL I WAS FOLLOWING WILL HAVE GONE COLD WHILE I WAS IN JAIL.

YOU ALL SEEM TO HAVE A NOSE FOR GETTING INTO TROUBLE.

SOMETHING I EXCEL AT, MYSELF.

MIND IF I TAG ALONG FOR A BIT?

NEW FRIENDS! HOW WONDERFUL!

AND THAT DOCTOR YOU WERE LOOKING FOR?

OH, I'M SURE WE'LL CROSS PATHS SOON ENOUGH.

NOW. LET'S SEE IF THE VILLAGE HAS ANY SPARE HORSES.

OF THE NON-DEMONIC VARIETY, OF COURSE.

TEAM NIGHTMARE

I JUST HOPE WE ALL MAKE IT BACK IN TIME TO SAVE GROG...

HEY, GETTING THE SKULL OF A NIGHTMARE WAS THE HARD PART.

I'M SURE IT WILL ALL BE SMOOTH SAILING FROM HERE ON OUT. RIGHT?

WE SHOULD PROBABLY RIDE FASTER...

THIS FRIEND OF YOURS MUST BE PRETTY SPECIAL.

IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD.

THE OTHERS BETTER HAVE FOUND THAT SKULL.

OTHERWISE, WE WASTED ALL THAT GOLD ON THE HORSES FOR NOTHING.

IF NOT, I'M SURE WE COULD SELL THAT NYMPH HEART FOR QUITE A PRETTY PENNY...

IT'S A JOKE! TO LIGHTEN THE MOOD.

ARE YOU THE ***ONLY*** ONE ALLOWED TO JOKE ABOUT OUR FINANCES?

...

GROG?

HOW ARE YOU HOLDING UP?

COULD USE SOME ALE.

AND MAYBE A NICE--

GROG?!

WUUUURGH?

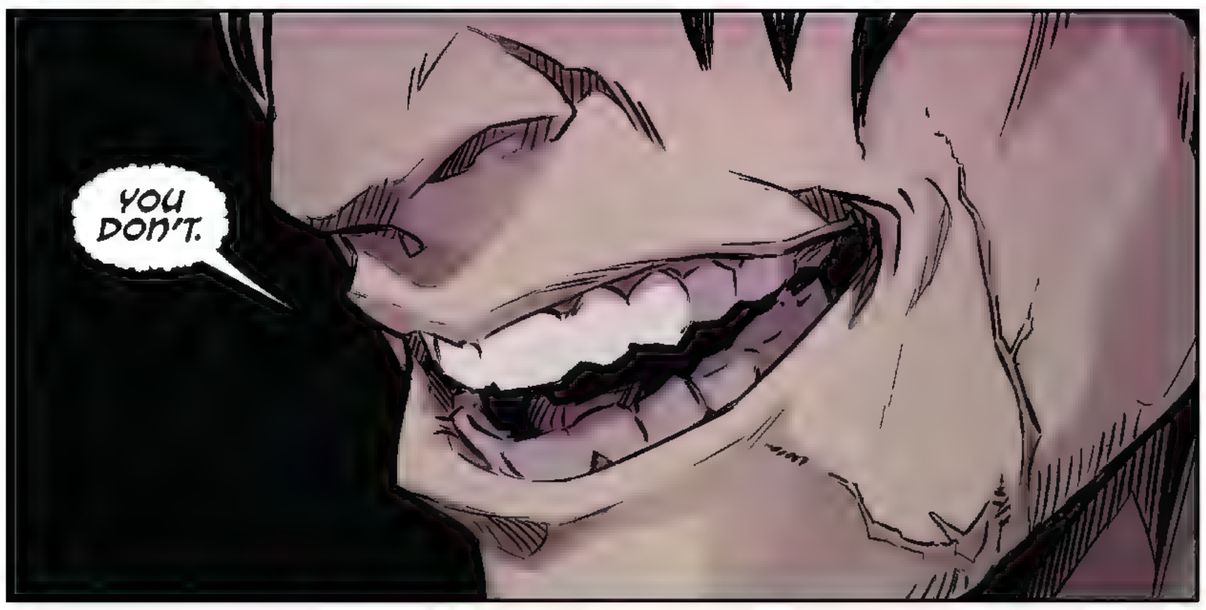
HEHEHEHEHEHEHEHEH

CREEPY LAUGH. THAT'S RARELY A GOOD SIGN...

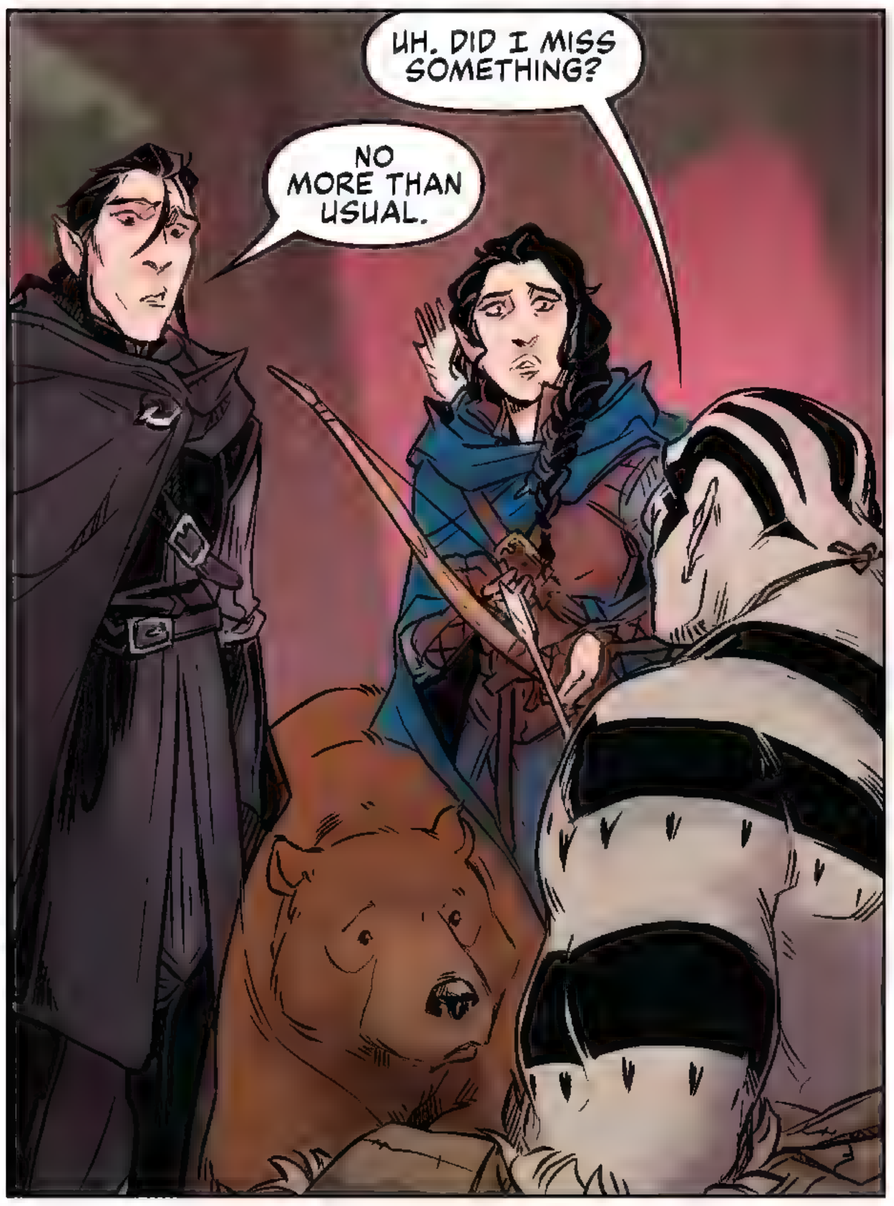
SOON... VERY SOON...

THIS BODY WILL BE *ALL* MINE...

NOT IF WE HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY ABOUT IT.


YOU DON'T.

WAIT, THIS ISN'T A HORSE.


UH. DID I MISS SOMETHING?
NO MORE THAN USUAL.

BACK ON THE HORSE, DARLING.
WE NEED TO HURRY.

OVER THERE!

OH, I WAS HOPING THEY'D ALREADY BE HERE...

HEY, IT'S EVERYBODY ELSE!

DID YOU GET YOUR THING?

WE GOT OUR THING.

PICK UP A STRAY, DID YOU?

OH! THAT'S PERCY VON...SOMETHING. HE'S VERY NICE!

IF YOU VOUCH FOR HIM...

WE GOT IT.

NOW, LET'S GET YOU ALL FIXED UP.

THE REALMSEER IS WAITING FOR YOU, MR. REYNOLDS.

HOPEFULLY WE GET TO USE THE FRONT DOOR THIS TIME...

HEY, DO I KNOW YOU?

NOT AS OF YET, NO.

OH, OKAY.

BRING HIM HERE, QUICKLY.

IF THAT SCAR IS ANY INDICATION, WE HAVE VERY LITTLE TIME LEFT.

SIT HIM DOWN RIGHT THERE.

YOU HAVE THE ITEMS?

WE DO.

GOOD, VERY GOOD.

NOW, IF YOU'LL ARRANGE YOURSELVES AROUND YOUR FRIEND.

HERE, HOLD THIS.

OH! OKAY.

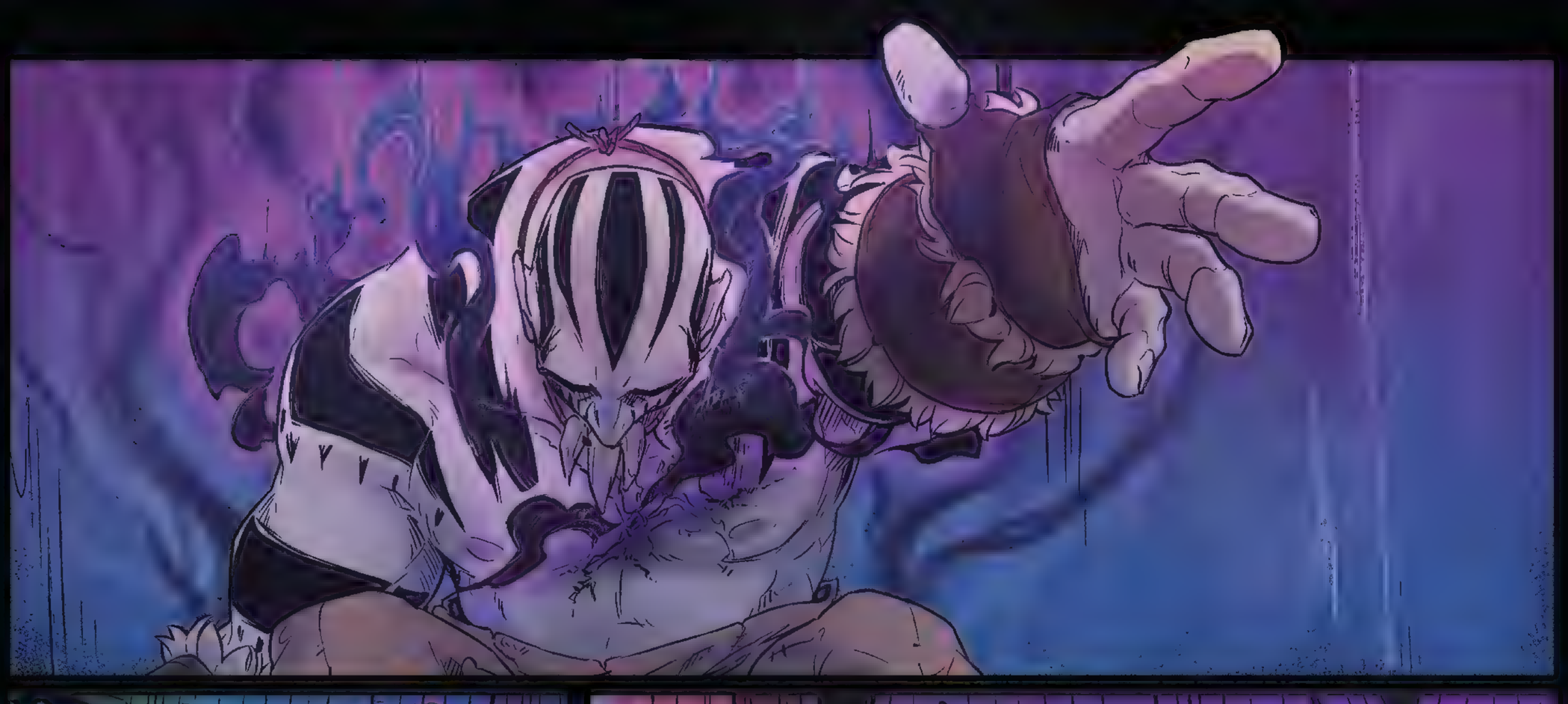
DO I GET A PRESENT TOO?

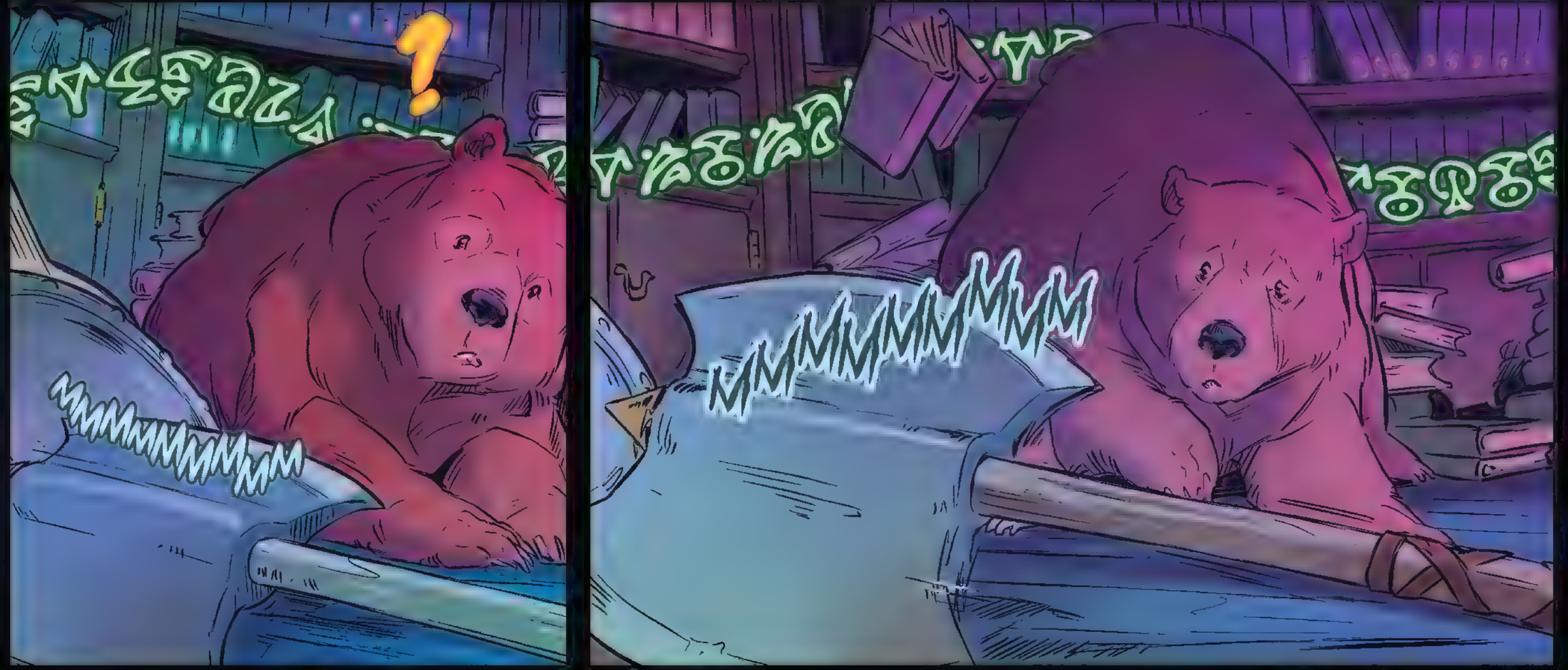
YES, IT'S CALLED NOT DYING.

OH, RIGHT.

OH, GROG...

IS IT SUPPOSED TO DO THAT?




MMMMMMMM
MMMMMMMM

WOOOOOOH

KEEP HIM CONTAINED!

TOO LATE...

YOU'RE TOO LATE.

THIS BEHEMOTH'S SHELL IS NOW MINE TO COMMAND.

ANY SUGGESTIONS ON WHAT TO DO NOW?!

ANYONE HERE SPEAK MAGICAL WHATSIT?

MY GUESS IS THAT HE CAN'T STOP THE SPELL ONCE HE'S STARTED.

I TAKE IT WE WANT TO AVOID KILLING YOUR LARGE FRIEND?

THAT WOULD BE VERY MUCH APPRECIATED, YES.

I THINK WE NEED TO KEEP HIM IN THIS CIRCLE.

YOU HAVE **FAILED.** AND NOW, YOU WILL **DIE.**

THOOOM

SORRY, GROG.

I WILL SLAUGHTER YOU ALL!

STARTING WITH YOU, OLD FOOL

ᚴᛖᛏᛚᛁᚾᚷᚱᛁᛏᚢᚱᛁᚾᚾᛁᚾᚷᛋᚴ

KEEP HIM WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE RITUAL!

WHAT DO YOU THINK WE'VE BEEN ***TRYING*** TO DO?!

THROW HIM A FUCKING TEA PARTY?!

IS IT JUST ME OR IS THAT ***REALLY*** UNFAIR?

I THINK HE'S TRYING SOMETHING NASTY!
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT...
BLAAARGH!
THAT'S DISGUSTING.
THAT'S THE POINT.

SCANLAN!

YOUR PATHETIC EFFORTS ONLY SERVE TO--

no!

OW.

ARGH!

BRING ME THE SKULL!

BEFORE HE BREAKS FREE!

CATCH!

OR BLOW IT UP. I SUPPOSE THAT WORKS TOO.

GROG?

YOU STILL IN THERE, BUDDY?

HI GUYS.

...DID WE FIGHT AGAIN?

YES, BUT WE'RE ALL OKAY NOW.

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF...

THE SCAR...

IT WILL NEVER HEAL COMPLETELY.

THAT SORT OF DARKNESS ALWAYS LEAVES A MARK.

BUT YOU MAY REST ASSURED THAT MY MAGICS WERE ENOUGH TO DESTROY DRATH FOR GOOD.

I, UH, GUESS I SHOULD THANK YOU GUYS.

SO... THANKS.

VERY ELOQUENT.

WHO *EXACTLY* ARE YOU?

PERCIVAL FREDRICKSTEIN VON MUSEL KLOSSOWSKI DE ROLO III.

HE HELPED US GET THE NIGHTMARE SKULL!

THANKS, NEW FRIEND!

URK. WELCOME.

AND THANK YOU *SO* MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR HELP.

OF COURSE.

JUST REMEMBER. YOU ALL OWE ME *QUITE* A LARGE FAVOR NOW.

OF COURSE.

AND, UM, SORRY ABOUT THE MESS?

THAT WAS CERTAINLY AN ADVENTURE.

AN ADVENTURE THAT DIDN'T *PAY ANYTHING.*

IT'S LIKE THEY SAY, FRIENDSHIP IS ITS OWN REWARD!

IT'S REALLY NOT.

WE CAN ALWAYS FIND MORE WORK. THE IMPORTANT THING IS NONE OF US ARE POSSESSED BY A LICH ANYMORE.

PROBABLY.

HOPEFULLY.

YOU LOT SEEM TO BE IN A CELEBRATORY MOOD.

I TAKE IT THE JOB WENT SMOOTHLY, THEN?

YOU HAVE THE BOX AS PROMISED? AND THE GEM MY MASTER LENT YOU?

UM.

WELL... WE KIND OF DON'T HAVE *EITHER.*

THERE WERE SOME... *COMPLICATIONS.*

WAS I NOT SUPPOSED TO SMASH THAT SHINY ROCK?

HOW **DISAPPOINTING.** YOU NOT ONLY APPARENTLY FAILED TO DELIVER THE AGREED OBJECT...

...YOU ALSO MANAGED TO DESTROY A BORROWED RELIC.

IT WOULD APPEAR YOU'VE ACCRUED A **SIZABLE** DEBT TO MY MASTER.

YOU'LL BE HEARING FROM US SOON. AFTER ALL, YOU OWE HIM **QUITE** A LARGE FAVOR NOW.

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE EARNING **MONEY,** NOT MORE DEBTS.

I WAS CERTAINLY RIGHT ABOUT YOU ALL BEING INTERESTING.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

MORE ALE!

To be continued in ***Vox Machina Origins*** Series III!

CRITICAL ROLE VOX MACHINA ORIGINS

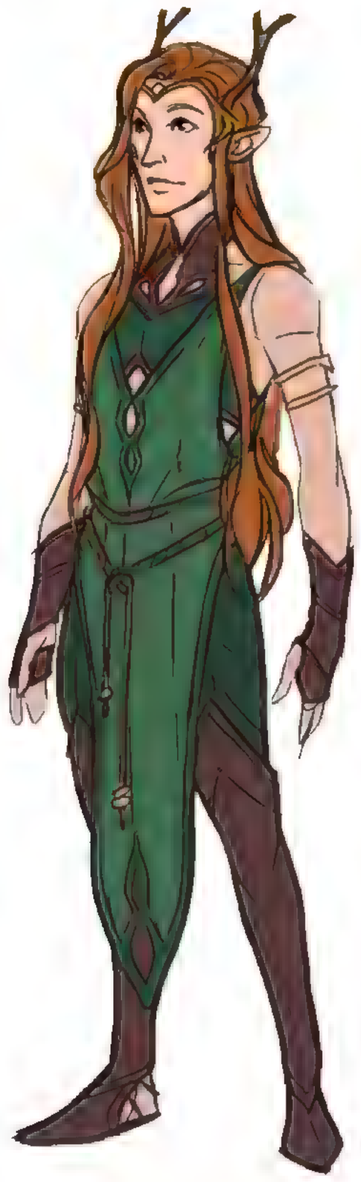
SERIES I SKETCHBOOK

Art by Olivia Samson ◊ Notes by F. Avedon Arcadio Barrera II

Olivia's early take on the characters was a bit more subdued, which then transitioned to a more expressive style.

VEX'AHLIA

VAX'ILDAN



KEYLETH

This style would help convey the emotions each character would feel throughout the series. Working closely with the cast and writers, we made sure that the outfits were something each character would actually wear. While we wanted to reference what fans had already seen from years of fan art, we also wanted to create something brand new.

SCANLAN

Scanlan will always rock that purple.

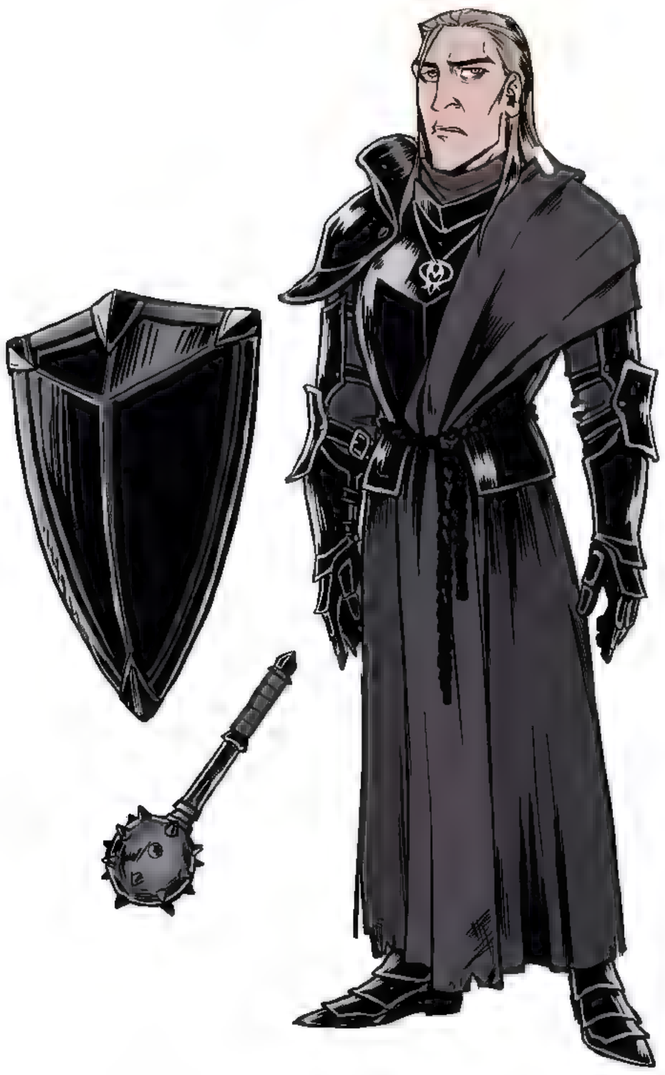
GROG

Seeing Grog without his beard, belt, or gauntlets gave him a much more childlike look, adding to his personality.

TIBERIUS

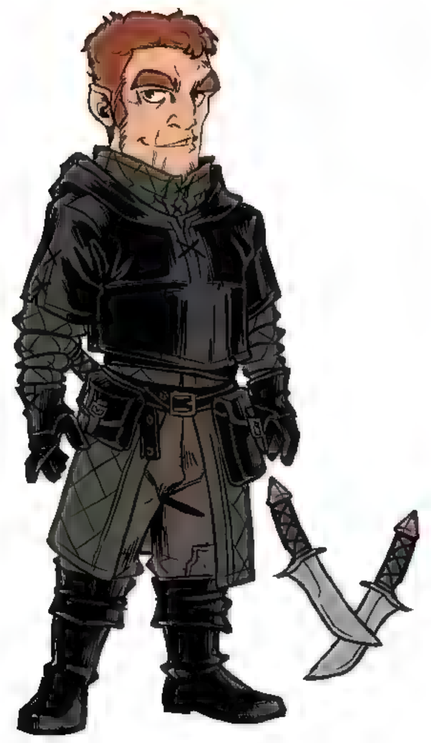
While Tiberius and Scanlan seemed like the most knowledgeable, they still expressed a sense of wonder when encountering the perils they faced.

It was interesting to see the characters in a way that almost felt like younger versions of each one, yet still carried a palette that would represent them now, at the end of their campaign. In a way, each character showed a degree of naiveté.



HELICAX

BRUL



STITCH

VASH

ARNICOR

THURISTA

With an origin series, designing brand new characters to interact with our party was a must. Olivia showed her artistic range wonderfully with the variety of new characters written into the story. Each one was unique, as they were, after all, different adventuring parties crossing paths, but you could see them having their own adventures out in the world.

ISELDA

THE WATCHMAN

SPIRELING HARROCK

THE ALCHEMIST

GOLEM

ORC

The enemies had to be just as interesting as our heroes, and even more fearsome. We also had to make it obvious that the Four from Foramere weren't the nicest group to be hanging around with. When it came time to reveal Iselda as a demonic Marilith, Olivia notes, "I just made a cooler version of Iselda."

SERIES II SKETCHBOOK

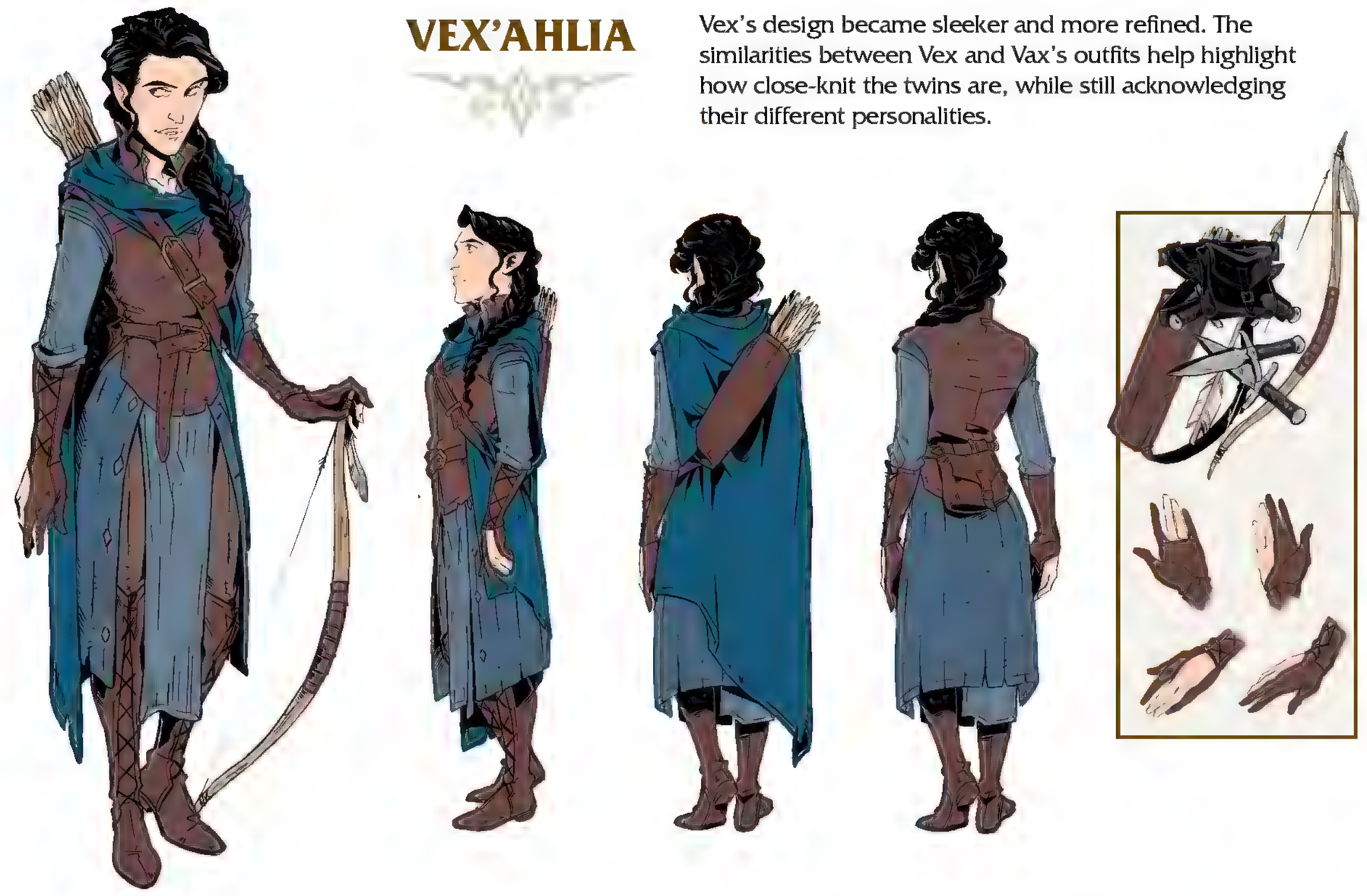
Art by Olivia Samson ◊ Notes by Rachel Roberts

VAX'ILDAN

Vax's look didn't change too much between Series I and II, but Olivia created a remarkable update in his body language and expressions.

VEX'AHLIA

Vex's design became sleeker and more refined. The similarities between Vex and Vax's outfits help highlight how close-knit the twins are, while still acknowledging their different personalities.



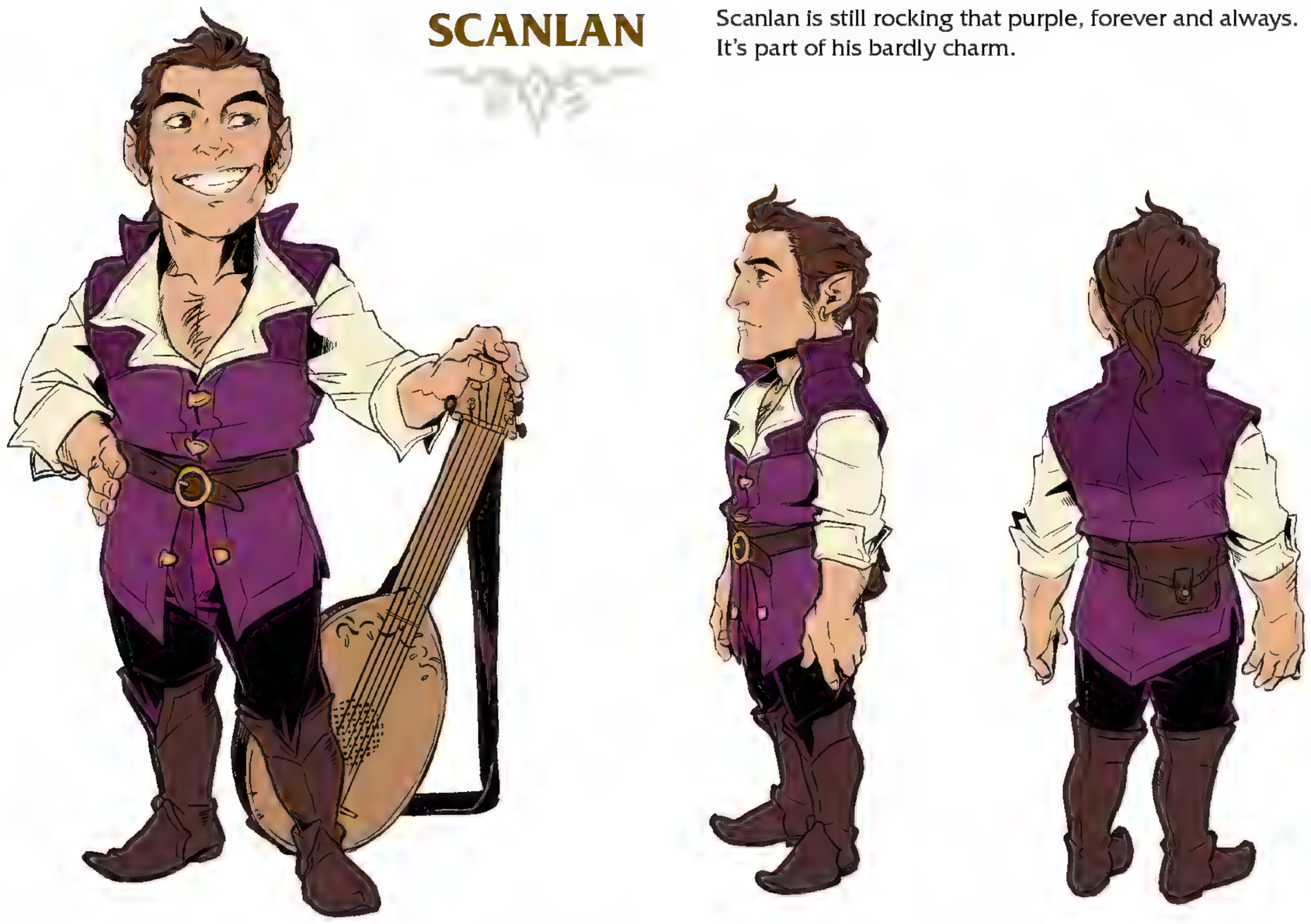
This section features all of Olivia's character reference sheets. They come in handy for a variety of reasons behind the scenes, but none more so than for MSASSYK, our colorist. Having solid reference for her to work from is instrumental in bringing the book together.

GROG

The most frequent comment we hear about Grog's appearance in the comics is "He looks strange without a beard!" Grog's baby-faced naiveté was a crucial part of his character for this arc.

SCANLAN

Scanlan is still rocking that purple, forever and always. It's part of his bardly charm.



The main cast of characters already had established looks from the first series, but Olivia polished them and gave them a few tweaks for series II, as if they had leveled up. Olivia leveled up, too, and these designs clearly show her hard work.

KEYLETH

Even though Keyleth's long hair is always down, it's important to establish what the back panel of her outfit looks like, as seen on the right. In case it does need to be shown, there's already a concrete design for it.

TIBERIUS

Our friendly neighborhood dragonborn's presence was short lived in this arc, but Olivia still updated his look. The blue-and-red palette somehow manages to say "stuffy scholar" and "don't mess with me" at the same time.

These reference images are also a good way for the entire creative team to share ideas, help us establish the book's aesthetic, and provide an effective way to make sure tiny details remain consistent from issue to issue.

PIKE

Both Pike's outfits needed to be designed from scratch. The cool blues in her color palette, paired with the apron and dress, give her a welcoming appearance. Her armor, on the other hand, makes her look like the competent, battle-ready badass she is.

Pike and Percy make their comics debut! Because we see them in varying types of dress (and in Percy's case, almost undress), Olivia provided multiple designs for both characters.

PERCY

When we first meet Percy he's imprisoned, so his garb needed to fit the bill. We went through several rounds of sketches for Percy's outfits (both with and without his coat) to achieve the desired amount of tattiness and disarray.

Having Olivia design outfits and equipment for new characters at the beginning of the art process helps us make sure she has everything she needs to begin penciling and inking the book. This also helps us ensure the characters are coming alive in keeping with the cast's wishes.

TRINKET

Even though everyone's favorite Wonder Bear didn't necessarily need a new design for series II, he got an adorable reference sheet anyway!

WILHAND

Pike's loveable Pop-pop Wilhand, described by Matthew Mercer as a "very old, very sweet . . . absent-minded but kind gnome," needed to appear aged yet respected, warm, yet a little zany. Olivia struck a perfect balance here—I certainly would drop by the Trickfoots' place for tea and talk.

DRATH MEPHRUN

Matthew's notes about this shady fellow listed him as "a tattered shadow of a man, with vaguely skeletal features peaking from his cloak of dark smoke and umbra . . . the dregs left from a failed ritual barely clinging to unlife through sheer willpower." Yikes, my dude. Olivia hit the nail on the head with his design.

STONEJAW STRONGJAW

With a name like Stonejaw Strongjaw, you know this guy's look had to be as intimidating as it was *humerus*—Olivia's nicknaming him "Skelly Jaw-Jaw" got laughs out of us for weeks after she turned in this art. He received two designs: one alive for Grog's visions, and one sans flesh for everything else.

DREZ VINA

TEMPLE KEEPER

ABJURIST NOJA

NAHLA

ESKIL RYNDARIAN

JEKT

These notable NPCs were already established in canon, but they needed fresh designs for this series. Olivia created multiple rounds for several of them, paying special attention to detail and making sure they were true to the cast's vision.

CRITICAL ROLE

VOX MACHINA™ ORIGINS

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This gorgeous hardcover edition collects the complete series I and II of *Critical Role: Vox Machina Origins*, featuring the writing of Matthew Colville and Jody Houser, art by Olivia Samson, colors by Chris Northrop and MSASSYK, and a new foreword by Gail Simone (*Batgirl, Wonder Woman*)!

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SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"